



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600067516V

**THE  
ROSE OF AVONDALE.**

**BY  
ELIZABETH MARY PARKER.**



**LONDON:  
ROBERT JOHN BUSH, 32, CHARING CROSS, S.W.**

**1872.**

*250. 9. 267.*



## CONTENTS.

---

CHAPTER I.—MR. FAIRLIE'S BEREAVEMENT.

II.—HAROLD'S BOYHOOD.

III.—RESIGNATION.

IV.—HAROLD BECOMES AN ORPHAN.

V.—GERTRUDE.

VI.—HOPES AND FEARS.

VII.—GERTRUDE'S TROUBLE.

VIII.—PLEASANT RAMBLES.

IX.—FIRST LOVE.

X.—HARVEST AT AVONDALE.

XI.—SAD TIDINGS.

XII.—OLD ANDREW'S WISH.

XIII.—AN EVENTFUL MORNING.

XIV.—SEPARATION.

XV.—THE CHRISTMAS GATHERING.

XVI.—A REPENTANT SINNER.

XVII.—LITTLE EFFIE.

XVIII.—WEDDING BELLS.

XIX.—WELCOME HOME.

XX.—JOY AND PEACE.



# THE ROSE OF AVONDALE.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### MR. FAIRLIE'S BEREAVEMENT.

THE day is done ; and slowly from the scene  
The stooping sun upgathers his spent shafts,  
And puts them back into his golden quiver !  
Below me in the valley, deep and green  
As goblets are, from which in thirsty draughts  
We drink its wine, the swift and mantling river  
Flows on triumphant through these lovely regions,  
Etched with the shadows of its sombre margin,  
And soft, reflected clouds of gold and argent !

*Longfellow.*

ON a certain range of hills in the West of England, remarkable for their extremely beautiful and romantic scenery, this little story commences. It was just drawing towards the close of a lovely summer day. The sun was slowly sinking behind the grand old hills, and casting long shadows across the fair Valley of Avondale, when you might have seen,

B



seated on a moss-covered stone, a young gentleman, and in his hand an open sketch-book. He seemed deeply absorbed in his occupation, and from the green sloping hill-side on which he sat cast many anxious glances, from time to time, upon the lovely scene beneath him ; showing that he found it almost impossible to do justice to anything so beautiful.

The lovely hills were dressed in their brightest summer robes, while the valleys were a perfect sea of beauty. The gardens and orchards (with which that neighbourhood abounds) were all in full bloom. The men had left their labours in the fields, and were busy round their pretty rose-covered cottages. All was calm and still. No sound was heard save the sweet, soft murmur of the distant waterfall, or the lowing of cattle, or now and then the merry tinkle of sheep-bells ; or occasionally from the green woods might still be heard the sweet voice of the cuckoo. As if to complete the beauty of the scene, through that pretty, peaceful valley flowed the waters of the smooth, fair Avon, from which it derives its name. In the distance, reposing as it were between two hills, stood the ancient and beautiful city of Bath, with its pretty surrounding villas and towering church-spires ; especially that of the grand old Abbey, plainly visible in the distance. We will

now turn our attention for a time to the young gentleman, who was still busy with his sketch-book.

Harold Fairlie was the only child of a wealthy English nobleman, who married a rich French lady, as good and amiable as she was accomplished and beautiful. He was many years her senior, and thus lavished upon her all the affection and fond indulgence that a husband could bestow. Rosine (for that was the young wife's name) fully returned her kind husband's love, and thus their home was the abode of peace and happiness.

They came to England after their marriage, accompanied by Annette Ernond, who had been the favourite attendant of Rosine from her childhood. After a brief stay in England they returned to the sunny South of France, to the Château de Beauville, which was to be their settled home.

Gentle Mrs. Fairlie (unlike her worldly parents) was glad to escape the pomps and vanities of fashionable life ; and the peaceful seclusion of the Château seemed to her almost a little earthly Paradise, together with the constant society and tender love of her devoted husband. Kind and thoughtful towards every one, she was soon universally beloved. To the rich, she was ever a sweet

companion ; to the poor, a faithful friend and helper in their times of need. With a heart overflowing with love and happiness, and light as the wild bird's wing, she passed her days.

Annette Ernond, in her sweet society, became a kind and thoughtful woman, and each day more warmly attached to her gentle young mistress.

But too soon the dark clouds of sorrow hovered over that happy dwelling, and the bright sunshine of their lives was suddenly overcast. The beautiful Rosine became a mother. Poor Mr. Fairlie ! who can describe his bitter grief when the kind-hearted doctor gently broke to him the sad truth that he must lose his heart's idol—that his precious flower was snapped in the stem.

Must she thus suddenly pass away, in all the early freshness and beauty of life's morning ? The cruel blow seemed almost greater than he could bear. The moments seemed ages, as he paced to and fro, with impatient footsteps, in the then deserted drawing-room : presently he sank into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Soon after, the door softly opened, and the doctor entered ; he dared not look up, he dared not speak or ask, but his face was still buried in his hands.

The doctor kindly laid his hand on his shoulder, and said, very gently—

“Mr. Fairlie, God is very good; we cannot tell what is laid up for any of us; but we know that his mercy endures for ever.”

Together they left the room and passed up the staircase, where the clock ticked sadly and solemnly as they went by it; they moved along the passage and pushed open the door of the room. The nurse met him, holding in her arms the little baby, wrapped in flannel. He gently pushed it aside—boy or girl, what was it to him?—he pushed it aside, and walked straight to the bed: the fair, white curtains were drawn, but with trembling hand he opened them, and looked in. So still, so fair, so peaceful; but passed away! The eyes that had always sought his, closed now, and the little, busy, throbbing heart chill and still for ever.

We will pass over the dark days of sorrow and suffering that followed, and the long, mournful, funeral procession, attended by numbers of people, from all parts of the little province, all anxious to follow her much-loved remains to their last earthly resting-place. The coffin was lowered, and the solemn words repeated, “Ashes to ashes, Dust to dust,” and all was over. With sorrowful hearts they

sought their respective homes, deeply sympathizing with the poor, bereaved husband, whose tearless grief was heart-breaking to witness.

He returned to his desolate dwelling, so lately the abode of love and happiness. Kind friends gathered round him, but gloom and despair seemed to have taken such hold upon him that all their condolence was received unheeded, and, like Rachel, when she wept for her children, he refused to be comforted. Even the poor, little, helpless, innocent babe failed to attract his attention; all he begged for was to be left alone.

Thus, for a little time at least, they thought it might be best to do so.

He seemed to give himself up entirely to despair, and many even feared for his reason, lest it should give way under the severe shock. The only thing that seemed to possess the least interest for him, or served to rouse him back to life, was superintending the making and erection of a very beautiful, ornamental, marble tomb, in memory of his dear, departed Rosine.

He was fully determined that neither labour nor expense should be spared to make it a perfect marvel of beauty and a clever work of Art. It was formed of a high, square block of pure, white marble, and on the top was placed a beautiful

marble vase, large enough to hold the choice bunches of flowers placed there daily by loving hands, and, standing high in the centre, was a marble lily, broken in the stem. On each side of the vase was a white dove, true emblem of peace and innocence, and on one side of the tomb, in letters of gold, was inscribed the simple word, "Rosine." Six marble steps surrounded it, and thus formed the basement. At each of the four corners of the tomb stood an angel with folded wings, holding a golden palm, as if to guard the slumbering dust beneath, and close at their feet stood a little lamb. Round the foot of the vase the marble was hollowed out, so as to form a basin, from which pretty little fountains threw up their sparkling waters in the sunlight, and fell back clear and cool into the basin, which was edged round with clustering leaves and creeping plants, cleverly cut in the marble. Ornamental bronze railings, tipped with gold, surrounded the whole, and altogether it was truly the wonder and admiration of every beholder.

As soon as it was completed, Mr. Fairlie began to make arrangements for leaving the Château de Beauville for a time, fraught with so many painful recollections.

To him, everything seemed changed. It was no

longer the happy home of a few short months ago. He knew that the sweet, gentle, young wife, who had filled it with sunshine and gladness, making it seem to him almost an earthly Paradise, was lost to him for ever in this world, and the sight of every familiar object that was once hers, recalled that loss so vividly to his mind, that the very sight of them was agony to his broken heart. He knew that the kindest sympathy of his friends could not restore to him his fondly-cherished idol—could not bring her back to life ; and in his bitter sorrow he felt sometimes rebellious against the Divine hand that had thus early gathered the beautiful flower. He forgot that out of this world of sin and misery, of sorrow and suffering, God had taken her to himself. Poor Mr. Fairlie ! they could only pray that, in time, he might feel more resigned, and say from his heart, “The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Before his departure, he made every possible arrangement for the comfort and welfare of his infant son, whom he placed in the kind, trustworthy hands of Annette Ernond. Her woman’s heart yearned for the little, innocent, helpless babe of her beloved mistress, and she resolved to devote the remainder of her days entirely to its interest and welfare.

Thus, when the bereaved husband left his home, he had the comfort and satisfaction of feeling sure that, during his absence, his child would be well cared for—that its helpless infancy would be tenderly guarded and watched over.

He bade adieu to the home that seemed to him fraught only with painful memories. He travelled first to England, but his sojourn was only a brief one. The few relations he had ever known, had one by one passed away, and he was left alone, the last of an noble family.

Slowly, but surely, he felt his usual robust health beginning to fail him. Grief, like a canker-worm, was gnawing at the very roots of his life, and the doctors ordered him change of scene and cheerful society, together with the benefit of warm, genial skies: so he returned to the Continent, and travelled by short, easy stages to Italy. At length he visited the beautiful city of Naples, where he remained for some time. Near there stands the celebrated volcano, known as Mount Vesuvius. He delighted to watch its changeful moods of calm and storm.

The fluid lake that works below,  
Bitumen, sulphur, salt, and iron scum,  
Heaves up its boiling tide. The lab'ring mount  
Is torn with agonizing throes. At once



Forth from its sides disparted, blazing pours  
A mighty river; burning in bronze waves,  
That glimmer through the night, in yonder plain  
Divided there, a hundred torrent streams,  
Each ploughing up its bed, roll dreadful on  
Resistless. Villages, and woods, and rocks  
Fall flat before their sweep. The region round,  
Where myrtle walks and groves of golden fruit  
Rose fair ; where harvest waved in all its pride,  
And where the vineyard spread its purple store,  
Maturing into nectare, now despoiled  
Of herb, leaf, fruit, and flower, from end to end  
Lies buried under a fire, a glowing sea.

*Mallet.*

At length, Naples and the surrounding neighbourhood had lost its interest for him. Restless and gloomy, he turned his steps towards Rome, where new attractions seemed for a time to divert his thoughts.

He loved to wander alone for hours round the Catacombs, or amongst the majestic ruins of that vast amphitheatre known as the Coliseum.

Avoiding society as much as possible, he passed his days in loneliness and solitude, until, almost weary of life, irritable and dissatisfied with himself and all around him, he resolved to return once more to the Château de Beauville.

Three years had passed away since Mr. Fairlie left his home. He had received kind, cheerful letters from time to time from Annette Ernond, full of glowing accounts of the health and rapid progress of his little son.

Cool and brief had been his replies, which often filled the warm heart of Annette with anxious and sorrowful forebodings, which she strove in vain to suppress. On his return, she found her fears were only too well grounded.

She was distressed beyond measure to witness the change that those three years had wrought in him, both in body and mind.

Stern and gloomy, he looked aged beyond his years. His tall, manly form already began to stoop; his hair was almost white, and deep lines stretched across his once smooth brow.

The sorrow that should have softened his proud heart had made it hard as Pharaoh's. The one he had loved with all the depth of his passionate nature had been taken away, and he resolutely strove to crush all the tender feelings to which she had given birth, and to steel his heart against love in the future, even that of his child.

Poor little Harold soon began to fear rather than love the "Papa" whose return he had been taught

to anticipate with joy. Though his wife's name was never heard to pass his lips, and none dared to mention her in his presence, Mr. Fairlie ever carried in his bosom a life-like miniature of that pure, sweet face. The cherished memory of his gentle bride seemed the only tender feeling of his cold, hard heart. He found the beautiful tomb fragrant with fresh-gathered flowers, showing that loving hearts had not forgotten the dear one that slept beneath.

During his short stay at the Château, his time was wholly occupied in beautifying and improving the little peaceful churchyard. Round the low boundary-wall he planted the mournful cypress in abundance. Weeping ash and willows were set; also, clustering roses and trailing passion-flowers were mixed with the sweet-scented myrtle, and the gentle wind fluttered the white leaves of the aspen.

When all was completed, he again left the Château, and wandered forth into the wide world alone.

---

## CHAPTER II.

## HAROLD'S BOYHOOD.

As years passed on, his home visits became shorter, and long intervals between, every visit adding fresh sorrow to the hearts of his faithful servants.

He had engaged the most proficient tutors and professors of the day to superintend the education of his son ; and the child had grown up surrounded with every earthly luxury and comfort that wealth could bestow, but he had never yet known the comfort of a parent's love.

His kind, courteous manners and generous disposition won the love of all who knew him. Thus time had flown on with its ever ceaseless roll, and little Master Harold had become a fine-grown young gentleman of eighteen.

In outward appearance, the image of his father's youth. The same clustering curls of golden hair adorned the broad, fair brow,—the same clear blue eyes and sunny smile ; but it was his mother's sweet, gentle nature that made him dearer than ever to the heart of the faithful Annette.

One lovely morning in the early summer, Harold

had just breakfasted, and rose to pay his accustomed visit to Madame Ernond's pretty sitting-room, before commencing his studies. He knocked and entered, and was surprised to find her easy-chair by the open window still vacant.

He glanced at the little timepiece, and saw it was past her usual hour. Fearing that she was ill, or that something unusual had occurred, he was hastening from the room to make inquiries, when he met her at the door, with a tearful, anxious face, and in her hand an open letter.

One glance at the handwriting, and he recognized it as his father's. He grasped her outstretched hand, and kindly inquired the cause of her emotion.

"Dear Harold," she said, "this is a letter from your dear papa, dated from Nice. He has been dangerously ill, but is sufficiently recovered to bear the journey home, and is even now on his way."

She placed the letter in his hand, and sank into her chair, watching his face as he eagerly scanned its contents.

It was short, as usual; but Harold noticed how often the firm hand had trembled; and, for the first time, he expressed a longing desire to return to his own quiet home.

"Poor dear papa," he said, sadly,—and his blue eyes filled with tears as he handed back the letter,—  
"I am so glad he is coming home!"

"Yes, dear Harold," answered his nurse; "and let us hope and pray that this sickness may be the means, with God's help, of softening his heart, and teaching him to seek that help and comfort from above which is never sought in vain. The Bible tells us that 'all things work together for good'; so let us hope that in this our dark cloud we may yet find a silver lining; and, though it has been long withheld, I hope even yet to see you, dear Harold, enjoy the happiness and blessing of a father's love. Thank God, he wishes to return; and I know all that willing hands and loving hearts can do to restore him, shall be done."

"Yes, dear nurse; and nothing shall be wanting on my part that will in the least contribute to his comfort or happiness."

"Now, dear Harold, you must return to your tutor," said Madame Ernond, rising from her chair, "as there is much to be done, and no time to be lost." So saying, she hurried out of the room with a cheerful smile, to make the necessary arrangements and preparations for the reception of the invalid.

The suite of rooms that Mr. Fairlie occupied when

at home, were fitted up with every elegance and comfort that heart could wish or that wealth could procure. Towards the close of the afternoon, Harold again joined his nurse, bearing a large basket of choice flowers, which he assisted her to arrange in the richly-gilded vases. At last all was finished to their satisfaction, and Harold said, "everything was looking its prettiest and best"; so they returned to Madame Ernond's quiet room, where she had invited Master Harold to take tea with her—an invitation which he was always delighted to accept.

How cool and pleasant everything looked as they entered! The green Venetian blinds were down, to exclude the sun's scorching rays, but one window in the shade was thrown wide open, from which there was a charming view.

The beautiful gardens round the Château were in their brightest splendour.

The smooth green lawns were interspersed with the gayest little flower-beds. The myrtle, the orange, and the heliotrope were filling the air with their delicious fragrance, and bright and sparkling rose the cool waters of a beautiful fountain. Harold seated himself by the open window, and gazed thoughtfully round that favourite room. There was

his little stool on which he sat at his nurse's feet, and learned his simple lessons. How quickly the time seemed to have flown since the dreaded arrival of his first tutor, fearing he might be hard and stern, "like papa." Happily, his fears were groundless. In him Harold found a kind friend and companion—a gentleman of great abilities and accomplishments. There, too, hung his first attempts at drawing, which the kind old nurse treasured for his sake. He could afford to smile at them now, as he compared them with his later paintings. The room was tastefully furnished. The floor was covered with cool white matting, long white curtains hung at the windows, and soft couches and easy chairs were placed round the room, that seemed to invite repose on their downy pillows.

The tables and cabinets were filled with pretty china and ornaments, most of which were presents or keepsakes from loving friends.

Madame Ernond (who had been occupied with the table arrangements) pronounced everything ready, and they sat down to enjoy a quiet chat, and talk over Mr. Fairlie's letter, though Harold laughingly declared that "the spread of delicacies looked so tempting, that for the next few minutes he could do justice to nothing else."



When tea was over Harold started for the church, where he had previously arranged to meet the organist. In the long summer evenings, his favourite occupation was practising on the fine old organ, and happy hours they were to him, spent in that organ-loft.

As Harold was leaving the Château, he met Monsieur Jacques, the faithful old steward, who had dwelt there from boyhood. He came forward with a good-natured smile to open the door for his young master, gazing after him with pride and admiration.

Shortly afterwards, a travelling carriage might have been seen driving along the high road. It turned in the direction of the Château, but stopped at a little distance from it, and an aged gentleman alighted, and sending on the carriage, he turned out of the road into a green footpath leading to the old grey church, with its ivy-covered porch and quiet, peaceful graveyard. In the bent figure, the feeble step, the long white hair and beard, the furrowed cheek and sunken eye, no one would have been able to recognize the "Mr. Fairlie" of early days. The ravages of time and sickness had both left the traces of their withering hand upon that once proud, noble form. He entered the silent graveyard, and walked slowly down the sacred streets of the peaceful city

of the dead, and entered the enclosure where slept his white-robed angel. The air was fragrant with perfume. Honey-burdened bees hummed their hymns to labour as they swung to and fro; and numbers of golden butterflies floated dreamily in and around and over the tombs, now and then poising on velvet wings, as if waiting, listening for the clarion voice of Gabriel to rouse and reanimate the slumbering bodies beneath the gleaming slabs. Little birds with gay plumage were flitting in and out of the trailing willows, twittering their evening vespers; a red bird perched on the brow of a sculptured angel, guarding a child's grave, and poured his sad sweet melody on the spicy air, two purple pigeons with rainbow necklaces, cooed and fluttered up and down from the church belfry. The golden beams of the setting sun were streaming warm and bright over the graves, but here its rays were intercepted by the church, and its cool shadow rested over the beautiful fountain, slab and flowers.

The old man seemed sad and weary, and taking off his hat, he passed his hand slowly over his forehead and sighed deeply, as he leaned heavily upon the marble tomb.

In a mournfully measured and well-nigh despair-

ing voice he said aloud,—“Ah, truly, throughout all the years of my life I have never heard the promise of perfect love, without seeing aloft, among the stars, fingers as of a man’s hand, writing the secret legend: ‘Ashes to ashes! Dust to dust!’ ”

A low wailing symphony throbbed through the church, where Harold was practising; and then, out of the windows and far away on the evening air, rolled the solemn waves of Mozart’s matchlessly mournful Requiem. The sun seemed to have paused as if to listen, on the wooded crest of a distant hill, but as the Requiem ended, and the organ sobbed itself to rest, he gathered up his golden rays and disappeared; and the spotted butterflies, like winged tulips, flitted silently away, and the evening breeze bowed the large yellow primroses, and fanned the drooping willows, and swayed the heavy branches of the mournful cypress; and the red nasturtiums, that hung in sprays down the sides of the vase, shuddered, and shook their blood-coloured banners over the polished marble.

A holy hush seemed over all things, save an aspen that grew near the church, and rustled its leaves ceaselessly, and shivered and turned white, as tradition avers it has done since the day when

Christ staggered along bearing his cross, carved out of aspen wood.

Leaning with his hands folded, his grey beard sweeping over his bosom, his bare silvered head bowed, and his mournful eyes resting on his wife's tomb, Mr. Fairlie stood listening to the sweet, solemn music, and when the strains ceased his thoughts travelled (as they so often did) back over the dreary past, until the sound of voices and the grating of bolts suddenly recalled them. Harold and the organist were leaving the church, and not caring to encounter strangers at such a moment, Mr. Fairlie glanced hastily round, in the hope of espying some friendly shade to conceal him from their sight.

His eager gaze fell upon the thick branches of the dark, waving cypress, and, quick as his feeble steps would allow, he passed between the tombs, and parting the branches, he stepped through the opening, and stood by the boundary-wall, totally screened from their view. He had no sooner reached his leafy hiding-place than he heard the sound of footsteps on the sharp gravel; and although his eyes were getting dim, and the evening twilight was already deepening, through a small opening he at once recognized his son Harold.

They approached the tomb he had just left, they lingered a few moments there, and passed on toward the outer gate, and were soon out of sight. Mr. Fairlie slowly and cautiously emerged from his retreat, supposing they had both returned to the Château, and approached once more the spot to him so dear and sacred. He slowly ascended the marble steps, and stood bareheaded, with folded arms, leaning on the slab.

When Harold reached the high road, he parted with the organist, and returned to enjoy for a short time the peaceful solitude of the graveyard; and imagine his astonishment at seeing an aged man standing reverently at his mother's tomb. He trod softly upon the smooth green grass,—he approached nearer and nearer to the aged stranger,—and at last, standing partially hid by a large grey stone, he narrowly scanned the upturned face, and to his intense joy he recognized his father. He was about to spring forward with outstretched arms, but a deep sigh, almost a moan, arrested him. He was so near as to hear the words he uttered, in sad, mournful tones,—

“Oh, Harold, my boy,—my dear, dear son,—how can I meet you, whom I have so long neglected! Oh, wretched man that I am, how gladly would I

give all I possess to have my child's love to comfort my last days ! ”

Harold could bear it no longer, and springing forward he threw his arms affectionately round his neck, and exclaimed,—

“ My own dear father, can you doubt my love for you ? Henceforth, my chief aim shall be to make you happy.”

Mr. Fairlie gazed up into the tender, tearful countenance of his son, and anguish seized his own. He instinctively put out his arms, then drew them back, saying, in low, broken, almost inaudible tones,—

“ I am too unworthy. Can you thus pardon my cold neglect ? Oh, my son, what a cruel, wicked father I have been, to one of the best of children ! ”

“ Dear father, for all the past I freely and fully forgive you. The dearest hope of my life has been that I might tell you so, and make you realize how ceaselessly my prayers and my love have followed you in all your dreary wanderings. Thank God that, at last, at last you have come to me, my dear, dear father ! ”

The next moment the old man's arms were thrown round the tall form, and his white hair fell on his son's shoulder. “ God be praised ! ” he said, as he strained his son convulsively to his

breast ; and tears fell fast over his furrowed cheeks. Harold laid his fingers softly and caressingly on the bowed head, and said,—

“Dear father, do not dwell upon the past; which is fraught only with bitterness to you. Throw those painful memories behind you.”

“My son, none but Almighty God can ever know the dreary wretchedness of my despairing soul.”

“And His pitying eye sees all, and His own loving words of sympathy are spoken again to you : ‘Come unto me, all ye weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ Lay all your sorrows at the foot of the Cross, and the peace that passeth all understanding shall enter your sorrowing soul, and abide there for ever.”

Once more silence fell over the darkening burial-ground. One by one the birds ceased their twitter, and went to rest ; and only the soft cooing of the pigeons floated down now and then from the lofty belfry. In the eastern horizon the silvery moon was rising, and the west burned with ruby flakes of vapour, watched by a solitary vestal star. Mr. Fairlie rose, and stood with his head uncovered, gazing at the nodding nasturtiums, that glowed like blood-spots on the white marble.

“Oh, if I could atone—if I could but recall the

past—but that is impossible. My only hope lies in the few remaining days of my future, if it please God to spare me yet a little.

“ Oh misery and mourning ! I have felt—  
Yes, I have felt like some deserted world  
That God had done with, and had cast aside  
To rock and stagger through the gulphs of space,  
He never looking on it any more ;  
Untilled, no use, no pleasure, not desired,  
Not lighted on by angels in their flight  
From Heaven to happier planets ; and the race  
That once had dwelt on it withdrawn or dead.  
Could such a world have hope that some blest day  
God would remember her, and fashion her  
Anew ! ”

“ Yes, dear father, so surely as God reigns above us, he will refashion it, and make the light of his pardoning love, and the refreshing dew of his grace, fall upon it ; and the waste places shall bloom as Sharon, and the lilies of peace shall lift up their stately heads. Have faith in God, and his blessed promises, and take all your sorrows to him whose ears are ever open to receive our prayers. Come, my father, let us go home now ; this spot is fraught with such painful associations, that open afresh all your wounds.”

Mr. Fairlie, leaning on his son's arm, turned to



quit the silent graveyard. The moon was already casting pale silvery beams across the tombs, and the evening breeze gently fanned his white locks, as he walked on with a heart too full for words. Age was bending his body to the earth with which he was soon to mingle ; pride, too, was torn from her throne, and laid low as the dead in their mouldering shrouds.

At length they reached the Château, and the soft breeze was fragrant with the perfume of the myrtle, the honeysuckle, and mignonnette.

At the door they were met by the two faithful old servants, who were anxiously awaiting them. Mr. Fairlie was too much overcome with emotion, even to speak to them, and Harold, wishing to spare him the least embarrassment, said in a cheerful tone,—

“Come, Jacques, we will conduct dear papa at once to his chamber ; he is almost overcome with fatigue, and I am sure greatly needs rest and refreshment.”

With a kind smile, Mr. Fairlie extended his hand to his servants in silence, then suffered Harold to lead him to his own room, where (with the assistance of Jacques) he tenderly undressed the feeble body and weary limbs, as he might have

done a little child, and laid him down to rest. Madame Ernond entered the room, bearing a tray filled with choice delicacies to tempt the impaired appetite.

Few were the words that passed his lips that night, but his grateful looks spoke the deep thankfulness of his heart. Harold passed the night by the bedside of his father, watching his restless slumbers, and praying that he might be spared to him yet a little longer ; and poor old Jacques slept in a room adjoining. Morning found him too feeble to rise, but all that medical skill and kind attention could do to restore him was done.

Day after day passed on, and brought no change. He slept but little, and pale and still he lay upon his bed, with closed eyes. His thoughts would constantly travel back over the dreary past of his wasted life, and often in the still midnight hours he held communion with his own heart and his God.

---

## CHAPTER III.

## RESIGNATION.

ONE bright morning, after having spent an unusually restless night, he called Harold to his bedside. A happy smile broke over his pale face as Harold drew his chair very close, and tenderly took his hand. They were alone, and in a low voice he said,—

“My son, your love and forgiveness have lifted a weight from my heart that has long oppress it, and will God be less gracious than man? Oh no; he has said, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be whiter than snow.’ Again he says, ‘Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out;’ and trusting in those blessed promises, I will boldly approach his mercy-seat. My son, the fondest hope of my life was crushed and shattered, but I could not see it was my Father’s hand that had dealt the chastening blow for my soul’s good. I did not even pray for a spirit of resignation to His will; and wayward and rebellious, the best years of my life have passed away. Only a little while, and my

sorrows will have ended. A few more rough waves, and then I shall be at rest; another storm or two to ride out, and then I shall reach the haven where I would be. I will strive meekly to bear the cross now, and soon I shall wear the crown—soon I shall reach those blissful shores where sorrow and sighing shall flee away for ever.

“Lord, wave again thy chastening rod,  
Till every idol throne  
Crumble to dust; and thou, O God,  
Reign in our hearts alone.”

He paused for a few moments; presently he spoke again,—

“My son, God oftentimes teaches us lessons in the shade of affliction and sorrow, which we could never have learnt in the sunshine of health and happiness. My God, help me from my heart to say, ‘Thy will be done.’”

Weak and weary, he lay back upon his pillow, with closed eyes, while his white lips moved as if in prayer. For some moments he was silent; presently he spoke again,—

“Harold, my dear boy, we know not what lies before you in the untried future, and if in after years (when I am laid in the silent tomb) you sud-

denly find some of your brightest hopes crushed and disappointed, or some heart's idol may be snatched from you, or some overwhelming sorrow may darken your young life; or whatever may be your trial, strive to think that your heavenly Father knows what is best for his child, and pray for a spirit of resignation. Do not spend the remainder of your life in useless regrets and repinings, and hard, rebellious thoughts against your Maker. But I pray God you may be spared from these trials."

He drew from beneath his pillow a little book, and opening it at a folded page, he handed it to Harold, saying,—“My son, read for me these beautiful lines.”

In a firm, clear voice, Harold read as follows:—

“Wouldst thou from sorrow find a sweet relief?  
Or is thy heart oppressed with woes untold?  
Balm would'st thou gather for corroding grief?  
Pour blessings round thee like a shower of gold.  
’Tis when the rose is wrapped in many a fold,  
Close to its heart, the worm is wasting there  
Its life and beauty, not when all unrolled,  
Leaf after leaf, its bosom rich and fair,  
Breathes freely its perfume throughout the ambient air.

Wake, thou that sleepest in enchanted bowers,  
Lest these lost years should haunt thee on the night  
When death is waiting for thy numbered hours,

To take their swift and everlasting flight ;  
Wake, ere the earth-born charm unnerve thee quite,  
And be thy thoughts to work divine addressed ;  
Do something—do it soon—with all thy might ;  
An angel's wing would droop if long at rest,  
And God himself inactive were no longer blest.

Some high or humble enterprise of good  
Contemplate till it shall possess thy mind,  
Become thy study, pastime, rest and food,  
And kindle in thy heart a flame refined.  
Pray Heaven for firmness thy whole soul to bind  
To this thy purpose—to begin, pursue,  
With thoughts all fixed, and feelings purely kind ;  
Strength to complete, and with delight review,  
And grace to give the praise where all is ever due.

Has immortality of name been given  
To them that idly worship hills and groves,  
And burn sweet incense to the Queen of Heaven ?  
Did Newton learn from fancy, as it roves,  
To measure worlds, and follow where each moves ?  
Did Howard gain renown that shall not cease  
By wanderings wild, that nature's pilgrim loves ?  
Or did Paul gain Heaven's glory and its peace,  
By musing o'er the bright and tranquil isles of Greece ?

Beware lest thou, from sloth, that would appear  
But lowliness of mind, with joy proclaim  
Thy want of worth ; a charge thou couldst not bear  
From other lips, without a blush of shame,  
Or pride indignant, then be thine the blame,  
And make thyself of worth ; and thus enlist  
The smiles of all the good, the dear to fame.

'Tis infamy to die and not be missed,  
Or let all soon forget that thou didst e'er exist.

Rouse to some work of high and holy love,  
And thou an angel's happiness shalt know,—  
Shalt bless the earth while in the world above ;  
The good begun by thee shall onward flow  
In many a branching stream, and wider grow ;  
The seed that in these few and fleeting hours,  
Thy hands unsparing and unwearied sow,  
Shall deck thy grave with amaranthine flowers,  
And yield thee fruits divine in Heaven's immortal bowers."

Harold softly closed the book, and at that moment Jacques entered the room with Mr. Fairlie's breakfast; so leaving the old man in charge, Harold quietly withdrew. He went straight to Madame Ernond's room, where he found a nice breakfast laid out, and his kind old nurse anxiously expecting him. Once more alone with her in that quiet room, Harold opened his heart unreservedly to her who was ever ready to sympathize with him in all his joys and sorrows.

From that day, the health and spirits of Mr. Fairlie gradually improved; at length he was able to leave his room, and walk a little in the beautiful grounds of the Château, leaning on the arm of Harold, who was his constant companion. Many happy hours they passed quietly seated in some

shady alcove in that sunny garden. Sometimes, but seldom, Mr. Fairlie would go back to the first days of his married life, when he brought home his sweet young bride ; but that was a subject too painful to dwell upon—that was a wound which time had no power to heal. Sometimes he would relate to Harold his adventures in his wanderings, or describe some of the wonders he had seen ; but oftener he would sit calm and still, while Harold read to him from God's holy Word. He would sit as if wrapt in deep thought ; his aged face wearing that blessed and marvellous calm, that unearthly peace, that generally comes some hours after death, when all traces of temporal passions and sorrows are lost in eternity's repose. His thoughts seemed to travel onward and upward, until they crossed the sea of crystal before the Throne, and in imagination he heard the song of the four-and-twenty elders.

Thus the summer passed away, and autumn was advancing in all its splendour ; the purple vineyards had yielded their rich harvest, and the hardy peasants had gathered in their crops of golden grain. Mr. Fairlie continued to improve, both in health and spirits, and expressed a longing desire to enter again the sacred walls of the old grey church, and once more kneel at God's holy table ; that he had,



alas, too long neglected. As the Sabbath approached he was most earnest in his devotions, and passed much time in secret prayer ; truly repentant of the past, with steadfast faith and hope he looked forward to a happier future in that blessed home beyond the grave.

It was Saturday afternoon, and Harold was setting out for the church, to practise, as usual, the hymns and chants for the morrow ; when at the door he met Mr. Fairlie, who expressed a wish to accompany him. They walked together until they entered the peaceful churchyard, when Mr. Fairlie turned silently towards the marble tomb, promising to join Harold in the church shortly. As he approached the tomb he saw a female, apparently arranging flowers in the marble vase ; hearing a footstep she raised her head, and he at once recognized the face of Madame Ernond. At sight of her his conscience smote him, when he thought of her pure, unselfish life—her devoted love to his child, and her long and faithful services, and he had thus treated with cold indifference one who had unsparingly spent the best days of her life in serving him. He stood gazing at her for some moments without speaking, as she finished arranging some delicate fern-leaves amongst the lovely flowers, and thinking her master might wish

to be left alone, she hastily gathered up her flower-basket, and was about to walk away, when Mr. Fairlie said, in a low, kind voice,—

“Madame Ernond, pray do not let me disturb you ; indeed, you would confer a great favour on me by remaining, as I have a few words to say to you alone ; and standing here by the grave of her we have loved and lost seems to give me courage to speak.”

He grasped her hand warmly, as he said,—

“My kind, good friend, for such you have truly been to me and mine, can you forgive the past ? Can you forgive my cold neglect of home and child ? Believe me, words fail to express how deeply grateful I feel for all your faithful services, which I can never repay ; but your God in whom you have so long trusted, he will give you your reward.”

The tender heart of the kind old woman was completely overcome, and for some moments she was unable to reply, but regaining her calmness, she said, gently,—

“Dear sir, I can assure you the past is all freely and fully forgiven, and as to my poor services, God only knows how gladly and willingly I have laboured for the sake of the dear one who is quietly sleeping beneath this gleaming marble. Oh, sir, I have long

prayed that once more you might be restored to peace and happiness. Thank God, my prayer is answered."

"You are a good woman, Annette; may Heaven bless you as you deserve!"

Both were silent for some moments; presently Mr. Fairlie spoke again,—

"Ah, truly, I see it all now; I see the rock on which my bark was stranded. Unworthy as I was, God blessed me with a sweet companion to walk by my side through life's toilsome journey, but I took the precious gift, and set it up on the altar of my heart, and worshipped it; yes, worshipped it, with all the ardour and devotion of my passionate nature. Thus, in love and mercy, my Father's hand removed my cherished idol for my soul's good, though in my ignorance and blindness I knew it not. If my pure angel had been spared to me, I should have been too happy for this world. Her sweet presence would have made my home such a perfect Paradise I should have had little thought of that happier after-life to which I am now looking forward with such longing hope. Let my pure darling rest with her God! She went down early to her long home, but she has been spared much suffering and many trials, and I would not recall her if I could, for after a few more days

I shall gather her back to my bosom in that eternal land where the blighting dew of death never falls—where—

“Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.”

A soft wind sighed through the trees, and fanned a beautiful cluster of late roses in the marble vase, scattering their fragrant leaves over the slab, and falling in a shower at his feet—he thought of another beautiful flower, faded away from this world, to bloom more brightly on the fields of Paradise in fadeless beauty for ever, and turning to Madame Ernond, he repeated, slowly and distinctly, those beautiful soul-inspiring lines,—

“’Tis not for man to trifle ; life is brief,  
And sin is here.  
Our age is but the falling of a leaf—  
A dropping tear.  
We have no time to sport away the hours ;  
All must be earnest in a world like ours.  
Not many lives, but only one have we,  
One, only one.  
How sacred should that one life be,  
That narrow span !  
Day after day filled up with blessed toil,  
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil.”

For some moments all was silent, even the grand

and solemn strains of the organ had ceased, but Madame Ernond saw his eyes were fixed with a tender gaze on the shining gold letters of that beloved name. She knew that his thoughts were still centered on that dear form that seemed ever present to him ; she thought of his faithful, unchanged love, that would only end with his life, and sighed deeply. He heard the sigh, and looking up, saw her kind, sympathizing looks, and, guessing her thoughts, said,—

“ My pure, beautiful Rosine, my soul's bride, my first, my only love ; soon I shall have crossed the gloomy river, and on the heavenly shore you wait to welcome me. On those beauteous plains, where flowers never fade, where fountains never dry, where shines in endless noonday the Sun of Righteousness, we shall spend a happy eternity ; when all sinful earthly passions will have passed away for ever, and our love will be pure as the angels.”

They left the sacred enclosure, and slowly bent their steps towards the porch, where they met Harold coming in search of his father, and was pleased to find him in such good hands. They returned to the Château together, conversing cheerfully on the most important topics of that quiet, peaceful neighbourhood. Mr. Fairlie seemed much fatigued, and glad to seek repose, for he knew he should need strength

on the morrow. The Sabbath morning dawned, and Harold hastened to his father's bed-side, and found him awake and looking calm and happy. He assisted him to dress, and together they partook of breakfast in an adjoining room. By the time they had finished they heard the sweet chimes of the Sabbath bells, and leaning on the arm of his son, Mr. Fairlie slowly walked towards the church. They paused for a few moments at the tomb, but Harold thinking his father needed a little rest before the service commenced, led him into the church. They entered the old familiar pew, but his eye rested upon a vacant seat, "her seat," and he felt for a moment almost overcome, but he knelt and prayed for strength in his hour of need, and the weakness passed away. He rose, and seating himself comfortably on the soft cushion, he waited for the entrance of the minister. His eyes wandered round the once familiar objects, but in what a different light he views them all now. He gazed at the sculpture over the door, representing the Good Shepherd bearing upon his shoulders a lamb—a lamb that had wandered from the fold, which he has sought and found. He thought how truly it represented his own case, a wanderer from the fold: the Good Shepherd had sought him, and carried him back with loving care.

There stood the beautiful font, Mrs. Fairlie's gift when first she came to the Château. It is of pure white solid stone, supported by four marble pillars of darker hue. On one side is sculptured the Cross, to recall to our mind the sign wherewith we were marked on the day of our presentation ; the Dove on the opposite side is the symbol of the Holy Spirit given in this sacrament ; the monogram IH $\Sigma$  is by some authorities interpreted as the initial letters of "Jesus Hominum Salvator," but by others as being simply the name of Jesus, either in the Greek IH $\Sigma$ ov $\Sigma$ , or, as the name is found written, Thesus ; on the fourth side is the Cross of Constantine. The tale to many is familiar ; but it may be refreshing and good to recall the faith of earlier days. Three hundred years after the birth of our Lord, Constantine, the Emperor of the West, was at war with Maxentius, the pagan Emperor of Rome, a fierce and cruel persecutor of God's Church. Constantine was not quite a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, but he had heard of the Christian faith, and in his doubt he not only ceased from persecution, but had honourable men within his camp, who bore the Christian name. It was on an evening in October that, as the Emperor made preparation for the battle of the morrow, and ere the sun had set, even as Con-

stantine gazed thoughtfully on the clear autumn sky, it pleased Almighty God to give him a wondrous sign. Before him stood a fiery cross, brighter than the sun, against which it seemed to rest; the cross was formed of two Greek characters, the monogram of our Saviour's name, and round it, in Greek letters, were the words, "IN THIS CONQUER." Again and again the Emperor looked with astonishment and doubt upon the glorious appearance, and as it passed away from his sight his faith increased. He made a drawing of the cross, and caused it instantly to be worked upon the banner which was to lead his army to the battle of the next day. The wondering soldiers saw the Roman eagle replaced by the unknown sign, and heard the watchword given, "In hoc signo vinces." The pagans trembled, but the Christian soldiers exulted, for by this they knew that their God was with them, and all that day, wherever the banner of the cross was seen, there was the victory, until, at evening time, the strife ceased, and Constantine, the Christian Emperor, was the conqueror of Maxentius and of Rome. From that period the Emperor Constantine bore the cross on his standard and on his coins, the Christians often engraving it upon their tombs, and it is on the font now to remind us, that by this sign we



alone can conquer the enemies of our souls—namely, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Near the door stood the alms-chest, on which the carving represented the “Widow dropping in her two mites.” The richly-stained and magnificent windows contained the Birth of Christ, the Adoration of the Shepherds, the Flight into Egypt, our Lord’s Baptism, our Lord’s going to Jerusalem with his parents to keep the Passover. Also, the Agony and the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension, the Burial, and the Day of Pentecost. Underneath each is a suitable text of Holy Scripture in French and English. Over the fine old organ (Mr. Fairlie’s gift many years ago) is a beautiful rose-coloured window, with a choir of angels round the Lamb, singing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” This was the gift of his dear young wife, together with the font. The pulpit is of pure white marble, with marble steps, and ornamental gilded banisters; the cushion on which the books are laid is of crimson velvet, with gold tassels, and hanging from beneath the cushion is a square of crimson velvet, richly embroidered with gold, and on which is wrought the initials of our Saviour; from the bottom is suspended rich gold tassels and fringe. Altogether it forms a beautiful contrast to the pure whiteness of the

marble over which it hangs. The chancel has a variegated pavement of black and white stone. The communion-table (covered now with its fair white cloth) is of carved oak, having the symbolic vine and the clustering corn wrought beautifully beneath the slab. Over the table is a large and beautiful painting of "The Last Supper," on each side of which is written, both in French and English, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. How quickly Mr. Fairlie's eyes scanned each familiar object, which has taken some time to describe to our readers; how quickly the thoughts that the sight of them has aroused chase each other through his mind! But the pastor entered, a stranger to Mr. Fairlie, as the old shepherd of that little flock is quietly sleeping in the silent graveyard outside.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

## HAROLD BECOMES AN ORPHAN.

THE organ ceased, and the services commenced, after which followed an able discourse from the words, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. xxii. 17). The blessed words seemed to him a special invitation, and he sat by Harold's side a most devout and attentive listener. When it had ended, leaning on his son's arm, he once more knelt at that holy altar where nearly twenty years before he had knelt for the last time with his dear young wife. He left the holy table, feeling strengthened and refreshed, and a blessed, happy peace seemed to have filled his soul. In the evening, after Harold had been reading to him from God's Word, he said, "My child, what is there in this world that can give us such heartfelt happiness as the comforting assurance that, though dead in trespasses and sin, you are forgiven. If we have a dear earthly friend whom we love, and our perverse human nature leads us on in a course

we ought not to pursue, or an angry word may fall from our lips and wound the loving heart, causing them to grieve over our conduct, and the sudden estrangement that has sprung up between us, then conscience will raise her rod and smite us, and we hasten to make some atonement, and long to be reconciled again. And, oh, what a happy thing to feel that for all past you are freely and fully forgiven, and the dear friend is ten times dearer than before ! And if we feel thus towards an earthly friend, how much more ought we to feel that longing for reconciliation with our Father in heaven, whom we are continually grieving and sinning against. If I look back on my dreary life of sin and gloom I am filled with doubt and despair, and could almost exclaim, —a whole life wasted, and will God accept my few last days and give me pardon ? No, surely there can be no forgiveness for such as I ? Then I seem to hear the words of some of his blessed promises in my ears, and not trusting myself to look back, my heart takes hope, and I look onward and upward, and pray for pardon, and I trust that prayer is answered.

“ I walk as one but yesterday delivered  
From a sharp chain ;  
Who trembles lest the bonds so newly severed  
Be bound again.

My steps I know are on the plains of danger,  
For sin is near ;  
But looking up, I pass along a stranger  
In haste and fear.

This earth has lost its power to drag me downward—  
Its spell is gone ;  
My course is now right upward and right onward  
To yonder throne.

Hour after hour of time's dark night is stealing  
In gloom away ;  
Speed thy fair dawn of light, and joy and healing,  
Thou Star of Day."

They little thought that that was the last Sabbath he would spend on earth, but so it was. From that time he sank rapidly. The day following, Harold, on going into his room in the afternoon, found him lying on a sofa by the open window, with closed eyes, and supposing him to be asleep, he quietly seated himself with a book, but soon he heard his father pronounce his name, and on going to his side he said,—

"My boy, I have one thing more to tell you, and I feel the time is short ; so come, seat yourself here that I may tell you now. It was something that happened at Nice—something that was the cause of my sudden return to the Château. I was staying at one of the hotels, and it was very full at the time,

and amongst the number were several English people, with whom I soon became acquainted. I was just recovering from my dangerous illness, and was walking out one lovely evening to enjoy the beautiful balmy air in the gardens of the hotel, when, feeling tired, I looked round for some secluded spot wherein to rest; at last I saw a lovely little summer-house, and I immediately took possession of it. I had not been seated long before I heard the sound of voices and approaching footsteps on the gravel walk. I cautiously parted some of the leaves that were woven through the trellis-work sides of the summer-house, and saw two strangers, an aged man leaning on the arm of a young girl, and from his appearance I took him to be the English gentleman whose arrival I had heard of during the day, with his wife and daughter. He looked weak and ill, as he walked with slow, tottering steps by the side of his daughter, who was looking so cool and fresh in her simple white dress, with a light scarf thrown loosely round her. Long tresses of dark glossy hair fell in rich abundance over her beautifully-formed shoulders, reaching almost to her waist; but her face was quite overshadowed by a large garden hat. I watched them some minutes, thinking she would presently raise her downcast gaze,

and I might be able to see her face. They came nearer and nearer, until I could distinctly hear their conversation. In one hand she carried a light camp stool closed, and as they suddenly stopped to admire the beauty of some plant in full bloom, turning her back to the summer-house, she set down the stool, and said, 'Dear papa, I am sure you are tired; do sit here and rest a few moments, then we will go back to the house.'—'Thanks, my little darling, for your kind, thoughtful care of me. Gertrude, my child, what should I do without your love to comfort me in my sickness and old age.' A loving arm was thrown round his neck, and as she kissed his cheek, she said, playfully, 'Come, papa, dear, it was of this lovely flower we were talking, not of me.'

"They soon afterwards left the grounds, and I saw no more of them that night, but the sound of that soft, kind voice haunted me, and seemed to stir the very depths of my soul. It seemed to increase my wretchedness tenfold, and show me plainer than ever how lonely and loveless my life was. I seemed to envy the old gentleman of his child's love, though I had shut my heart against my own. All through my dreams that sweet voice sounded in my ears, and when morning came I longed to obtain a glimpse of the face of the owner of it. The day passed, and

I had seen no sign of the new comers. Evening came, and I wandered about the garden in hopes of seeing the strangers again. I sat down on one of the garden-seats, and restlessly turned over the leaves of a book in my hand. Presently I heard footsteps, and the same gentle voice that had so deeply interested me again came floating on the evening breeze. They came straight on, and I knew they would pass the spot where I sat. Now, I thought, I shall behold that face I have been wishing so much to see. They caught sight of me, and she lifted her face as she came directly opposite where I sat. Oh, Harold, I shall never forget it; my heart seemed to cease beating. I could scarcely draw my breath, for it seemed as if your dear sainted mother stood before me again, in her early beautiful girlhood. I heard the sound of the old gentleman's voice; he spoke to me, but I knew not what he said. A mist seemed to come before my eyes, and all grew strangely dark; the book dropped from my hand, and I fell back on the seat, and I remember no more. I suppose I must have fainted. Consciousness slowly returned, and on opening my eyes I gazed round in bewilderment, but the sight of that kind face bending over me immediately recalled to my mind what had happened. The old gentleman was beside me, support-



ing my helpless form, while his daughter was tenderly bathing my temple and chafing my cold hands. In answer to their kind inquiries, I assured them I was much better. I told them I had been dangerously ill, and that I was still in a delicate state of health. I expressed a wish to return to the hotel and seek my own chamber. I tried to thank them for their kindness to a stranger, but the words died away on my lips; they at once accompanied me into the hotel, where they delivered me safely into the hands of my doctor, and wishing me a kind Good-night, hoped to have the pleasure of seeing me on the morrow. The next morning, feeling stronger and better, I left my room earlier than usual, and on going into the garden I paced backwards and forwards on the smooth green lawn; at length I seated myself on a garden-seat to rest, and on looking up I saw my kind little friend of the previous evening coming tripping across the lawn towards me, with innocence and happiness beaming on her beautiful face. I rose and held out my hand, wishing her Good-morning, but she kindly begged me to be seated, saying,—‘Dear papa saw you from his window, and has sent me to inquire after your health.’—‘It is extremely kind of both you and your papa to take such interest in a stranger; pray accept my

warmest thanks for all the trouble I occasioned you last evening, and I am happy to say I am very much better and stronger to-day. My compliments to your papa, and please tell him, that as I am quite alone in this place, I hope to have the pleasure of making his acquaintance.'

"She looked into my face with such child-like simplicity and artlessness, as she said,—'Oh, sir, papa and I are just coming out for a little stroll; may we join you here?'—'With pleasure, my sweet child; till then farewell.'

"She was gone in a moment. I only caught sight of her white dress fluttering in the breeze, and heard the sweet music of her voice as she ran into the house carolling like the gladsome birds on that beautiful morning. She soon returned with her father, who smilingly introduced himself as Lionel Heathcote, and his daughter Gertrude. From that day we became firm friends, and many were the happy hours we passed together. Sometimes Mrs. Heathcote would join us, but generally Gertrude, her father and I, formed a happy trio. Like some sweet ministering angel, she was ever in attendance to our numerous little wants, so that instead of one invalid, she voluntarily undertook the care of two, herself finding happiness in seeing those around her

happy. She would fix us comfortably (as she used to call it), with soft cushions and wraps, under the shady trees, on the garden-seats, when the orange and the myrtle were filling the air with their rich fragrance, and, as an especial treat, bring out our cigars and newspapers, and when all was arranged to her satisfaction, she would seat herself beside us to read aloud for our entertainment. Thus weeks passed away, happier ones than I had known for many a dreary year. Never was there a more affectionate and dutiful child, never a more fond and indulgent parent. I found that Mr. Heathcote was an English merchant, and had visited the Continent for the benefit of his health, which had become much impaired, and that his beautiful child was already betrothed to the son of an old college friend of his own; but as they were both young, and Gertrude could not bear the thought of leaving her happy home and fond parents, the marriage was postponed for a time. One calm beautiful evening, as we were sitting in our favourite summer-house, I called Gertrude to my side, and said,—‘My kind little friend, will you do me the honour of accepting and wearing this little ring, which I offer as a small token of gratitude for your kindness to me, a stranger?’

“So saying, I took her little white hand, and placed the pretty gold ring on her finger. She looked first to her father, who smilingly sanctioned her acceptance of the gift, and then raised her bright dark eyes to my face—those lovely beaming eyes that seemed to bring back early happy days to my memory—they looked the only thanks I asked, the only thanks I would accept. I said,—‘ Dear Gertrude, promise me you will always wear this ring for my sake, and as you gaze upon it when you are back again in dear old England, and I am far away, let it bring to your memory these golden hours, in which you have made a solitary old man very happy. Like these precious little diamonds, may your presence ever cast bright beams of sunshine and happiness on all around you, and like these crystals, may you be preserved from an evil world; may your young heart ever be pure and loving, and free from all sinful stain, clear as crystal. But above and before all things, let the sight of this little pearl encourage you to seek that pearl of great price, without which our best earthly treasures are but vain and worthless, and let this blood-red stone in the centre remind you of the centre of our highest hopes—namely, that Christ has died, and shed his precious blood for us, that blood that can cleanse

from every sin. God bless you, my sweet child, and may you be happy.'

"She poured forth her thanks in her sweet, artless manner, promising she would always wear it. She certainly would not have taken it as a reward for her trifling services, but as a keepsake ; she said she should feel proud and happy to wear it for my sake, and in remembrance of her happy visit to Nice, and would always strive to remember the kind advice of the giver. She hastened into the house to show her dear mamma her treasure. I said,—' Mr. Heathcote, surely a king might envy you of such a daughter.' —'I am glad to hear you say so, my friend ; she certainly is a dear, good child ; in fact, she is the very sunshine of my life. You must not think me vain if I tell you she is the pride and favourite of the whole neighbourhood at home. She is called "the Rose of Avondale."—'Then surely she is rightly named,' I answered.

"Just then we saw her returning with her mamma, who warmly thanked me for my kindness to her daughter ; but I told her I wished for no thanks. I only asked as a favour that she might wear that ring for my sake. We spent a very happy evening together, and it was late before we separated that night. I shook hands with my friends, and im-

printed a kiss on dear Gertrude's beautiful brow ; and wishing them all Good-night, I sought my chamber, and was soon peacefully sleeping. It was long past my usual hour for rising when I awoke and looked at my watch the next morning. After breakfast I sought the ground as usual, thinking to meet my friends, but they were nowhere to be seen. Noon came, and I began to be uneasy, and on making inquiries of the servants, I found that Mr. and Mrs. Heathcote and the young lady had left the hotel very early that morning, having received a telegram suddenly calling them home. At first I could scarcely believe my senses. To think they were really gone, and left no letter or message for me, and I knew not the proper address to find them in England ! I knew not what to do. I felt very thankful that I gave Gertrude my keepsake in time. I sorely missed my friends at first ; the place seemed to have suddenly lost all its beauty and interest, and again I felt lonely and wretched. I determined to wait a little time, in hopes of a letter, and then leave the place at once. They had left just a fortnight when I received an English letter in the deepest mourning ; my hands trembled as I hastily broke the seal. Guess my sorrow and surprise when I read a few hasty lines from Mrs. Heathcote, apolo-

gizing for their abrupt departure from the hotel, but sad and sudden news had called them home ; namely, that Mr. Heathcote's clerk had absconded with a large sum of money, collected in his absence, and no traces of him had as yet been discovered. The shock had been too much for poor Mr. Heathcote, and on their landing at Dover he was taken ill, and died at the hotel soon afterwards. They were then leaving Dover for their own home. Gertrude desired to be kindly remembered to me, but her mamma said the poor child was almost overwhelmed with sorrow. I could well imagine their grief, but not one line of condolence could I write, as I was still in ignorance of their address, as poor Mrs. Heathcote had omitted it. In my weak state, the sad news fell upon me like a blow. I thought how soon I myself might be called away. I thought of my home, especially of you, my son, and my heart yearned for you as it had never done before. The society of that sweet child had awakened all the kinder thoughts and feelings of my nature, and I longed to fold you to my heart, to have your love to comfort and cheer my last days. God only knows how little I deserved such a blessing. I returned to my home, and, unworthy as I was, it was bestowed upon me. You know the rest, my son, and may

Heaven bless you for your dutiful conduct. There is one thing more I have wished to see accomplished, before I lay down in the peaceful tomb, but as that is denied me, I must leave all trustingly in the hands of Providence. I have longed that my life might be spared to see you married and happy. I pray God to enable you to choose wisely. If you are but blest with a bride as fair and good and pure as your dear angel mother, or that sweet child Gertrude, I could ask no more. I feel that my time here is now very short, Harold, and I have much to say to you, but my strength is fast failing me. I must rest awhile."

Harold smoothed the soft pillows of the sofa, and tenderly ministered to his father's wants, gently closed the window, lest any chance noise outside might disturb him, and left him to enjoy a quiet sleep. Thus the rest of the day passed, and on the following morning he rose, and seeming a little stronger, he expressed a wish for Harold to accompany him into his private study. He threw his loose dressing-gown round him, and girdle, and proceeded thither. He took with him a large bunch of keys, and fitting one into the lock of a large iron safe, he swung back the heavy door, and pointing to a large packing-case, he asked Harold to assist him

4



to draw it out, as he wished it opened. Harold set to work to unfasten the case, but his father said,—

“Harold, before you raise the lid, let me tell you that this is the portrait of your dear mother when first she came to the Château. I had it painted in Paris, and before I left home, after her death, I myself packed it up in this case as it had come to me from the painter, and locked it in this safe for security. I could not bear to leave it exposed to strangers’ eyes, and in my bosom I have always carried a miniature of the same. Now Harold, I give this beautiful painting into your charge, and I think I need not tell you to guard it as your dearest treasure, for your dear mamma’s sake.”

The case was then opened and the painting removed, and for the first time Harold beheld the beautiful face and form of his mother. He stood gazing at it in silent astonishment and admiration, until the tears were fast gathering in his clear blue eyes. Never, even in his dreams, had he seen a face so lovely. She wore a robe of black velvet, rich white lace and pearls adorned her snowy neck and arms, and costly pearls were on that marble brow, contrasting beautifully with her dark glossy hair, that fell in a profusion of ringlets almost to her waist; but Harold thought the face beautiful

beyond description. The clear hazel eyes, with their long, drooping, dark lashes; the dark and beautifully arched eyebrows; but above all, the angelic sweetness of its expression, made him feel that to look upon such a face was to love it. He turned and thanked his father for the precious gift, assuring him how dearly he should ever prize it for both his dear parents' sake. He saw a sudden pallor overspread his father's face, and said kindly,—

“Dear papa, let me assist you back to your room; you are exerting yourself too much, and must rest awhile.”

But he said,—

“Not yet, my son; I must finish my task: it is only a momentary weakness, it will soon pass away. It is a little like I felt at first sight of dear Gertrude Heathcote. Happy scenes and sweet memories crowd upon me thick and fast, at sight of that dear face; early happy days come back fresh to my mind's eye, as if 't were only yesterday. Golden hours of youth that can never come again; golden dreams of bliss and happiness, no sooner realized than withdrawn for ever. But soon, very soon, in Heaven, I hope to enjoy the perfect realization of my dreams of peace, happiness, and love.”

He ceased speaking, and covered his face with his thin white hand for a few moments ; then suddenly rose and rang the bell, which soon brought his old faithful attendant Jacques. Mr. Fairlie quietly said,—

“Will you please assist Harold with this picture to my chamber, and I will show you where I should like it placed.”

They put back the case, and locking the safe, Mr. Fairlie gave the key to Harold. They then returned to the bed-chamber, and placed the picture where the sufferer’s gaze might always rest upon it. He then said,—

“My son, here let it remain while I live, which will be only a short time now ; when I am gone, you may place it where you please, as I know you would like to have it near you.”

Poor old Jacques stood regarding first the picture and then the stooping, weak form of his master, thinking no doubt how altered and changed from the Mr. Fairlie, the proud and happy bridegroom who brought that sweet angel to grace his home. The good old man could no longer control his feelings, and hastily dashing away the tears that would come, in spite of his efforts to force them back, he turned and left the room. Mr. Fairlie,

almost overcome with fatigue and emotion, threw aside his dressing-gown, and lay back wearily on his pillows. He drew from his bosom a miniature, which he showed to Harold, and said,—

“This is the fac-simile of your sweet mother’s face; while I live I shall always have it near me, when I die take it, and carry it in your bosom always, as I have done.”

He placed it under his pillow, and still holding it with one hand, he fell asleep. From that time a great change in him was manifest to all who saw him; the doctors shook their heads gravely, for they knew that the seal of death was already on his countenance. Still he seemed very peaceful and happy, and spoke calm and resignedly of his approaching death, and gave Harold much advice and instruction as to the future, especially begging him to cheer and comfort the declining days of those two faithful old servants, who had been to him in his helpless infancy as both father and mother. He had made ample provision for them, but begged Harold, for his sake, to be a friend to them as long as they lived. Poor Harold! that was a duty of which he needed no reminder; they were too dear to him ever to be neglected or forgotten.

Mr. Fairlie passed much of his time in secret

prayer, and listening devoutly to those blessed words of life and comfort which Harold read to him oftentimes from God's holy Book. He was perfectly conscious to the last, and wishing them all a kind farewell, hoped to meet them in Heaven. The day previous to the next Sabbath was his last on earth ; in the evening he died. Calm and peacefully he passed away, full of faith and hope, with prayer still on his lips, began on earth, but finished in a song of praise in Heaven. Soon another slept beneath the peaceful marble tomb—another name, too, glittered and shone in the sunlight. Thus in death they were once more united, to spend in Heaven their happy eternity, never more to part.

Rest, weary soul!

The penalty is borne, the ransom paid,  
For all thy sins full satisfaction made ;  
Strive not thyself to do what Christ has done,  
Take the free gift and make the joy thine own ;  
No more by pangs of guilt and fear distrest—

Rest, sweetly rest.

Rest, weary heart!

From all thy silent griefs, and secret pain,  
Thy profitless regrets and longings vain ;  
Wisdom and love have ordered all the past,  
All shall be blessedness and light at last ;  
Cast off the cares that have so long oppress—

Rest, sweetly rest.

Rest, weary head !

Lie down to slumber in the peaceful tomb,  
Light from above has broken through its gloom ;  
Here in the place where once thy Saviour lay,  
Where he shall wake thee on a future day,  
Like a tired child upon its mother's breast—

Rest, sweetly rest.

Rest, spirit free !

In the green pastures of the heavenly shore,  
Where sin and sorrow can approach no more,  
With all the flock by the Good Shepherd fed,  
Beside the stream of life eternal led,  
For ever with thy God and Saviour blest—

Rest, sweetly rest.

---

## CHAPTER V.

## GERTRUDE.

WE will now pass over a space of four years, during which time Harold Fairlie had grown up into a tall, handsome gentleman—a true gentleman in every sense of the word. Noble and generous, yet ever kind and gentle. There was truth and sincerity in Harold. His character was a beautiful combination of tenderness and strength. There was a great charm in his kind genial manner, his perfect freedom from all selfishness, his cultivated mind and spiritual nature—a charm which won the hearts of all who knew him.

Since the death of his father, most of his time was spent in study, only relieved by an annual visit to England during the summer months. He had explored the beauties of the Lake country, and visited the fashionable watering-places of the South. The beautiful west, with its fair hills and vales, seemed next to attract his attention, and thither he directed his course. After a short stay at Clifton, and the beautiful city of Bath, he visited Avondale,

where the wild romantic scenery which stretched for miles around possessed such a peculiar charm for him (a true lover of Nature as he was), that he determined to make a sojourn in the neighbourhood, that he might enjoy at leisure its peaceful solitudes. So for the present he took up his abode at the little wayside inn, the only place of accommodation for a stranger of which that quiet little hamlet could boast. The time seemed to pass away very pleasantly ; those lovely summer days were chiefly spent in his favourite occupation, drawing, and the lovely evenings in quiet moonlight rambles. It was thus we found him busy sketching on the hill-side, that peaceful summer evening, when we commenced our story. The twilight was fast deepening ere he rose, and collecting his drawing materials, prepared to seek his temporary home. He heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and on looking up he saw the venerable form of the white-haired pastor, whom he remembered to have met several times since he came to Avondale. He smiled pleasantly on the handsome stranger, and wishing him a cheerful Good-evening, they soon entered into conversation, and as they both turned off in the same direction, it was quite natural that the pastor, with the privilege of age, and a friendly feeling, should ask Harold a



few questions respecting his sojourn amongst them. He soon drew from the frank and open-hearted Harold all he asked to know ; they passed on in animated conversation until they reached the parsonage. Harold's heart warmed towards the kind old man ; he felt already that he had found a friend.

They walked together until they came to the pretty entrance-gate. Mr. Hammond kindly invited Harold to enter his little peaceful dwelling, but he declined, saying,—

“My kind landlady will have prepared my little dinner—or rather supper, I must now call it—so I must not keep her longer waiting. Some other time I shall be happy to accept your kind invitation.”

The pastor replied,—“I fear you will find my home very dull ; I have only my daughter Milley to bear me company, but I love the solitude of my peaceful home, and I and my sweet child are very happy.”

As he spoke the words a door opened, and light footsteps flew along the gravel walk towards the entrance-gate, and a sweet merry voice exclaimed,—

“Papa, dear, I am so glad you are come—the speaker stopped short on seeing a stranger.

"Well, my darling," Mr. Hammond said, "what have you to tell me?" (as he caught sight of her happy, eager face, in the deepening twilight). So saying, he hastily opened the gate, and introduced to Harold his daughter, Milley Hammond. She bowed gracefully to the stranger, then turning to her father, said,—

"I fear I was impatient for your return, dear papa, but I longed to tell you that dearest Gertrude has returned to Avon Villa, with her mamma, and our little croquet party is fixed for to-morrow afternoon, if all is well"

"I am very glad, and I hope my little Milley will have a very happy day with her young friends," replied her father, fondly.

Mr. Hammond then warmly pressed Harold to make one of the number, and as Milley's winning voice joined in the request, he felt it impossible to refuse, and being himself an expert player, he fairly promised.

They shook hands and separated at the parsonage gate, and as Harold walked slowly towards the little inn, he could not help wondering to himself why that name should excite such startling interest in his breast. For the name of Gertrude seemed still sounding in his ears ; and as he thought thereon, a

vision of the beautiful maiden at Nice seemed to rise up before him in imagination. "But, no," he thought to himself, "it cannot be the same; there are many, no doubt, who bear that name beside Gertrude Heathcote." Still he felt a great curiosity to behold the person whose return could cause such great joy in that quiet neighbourhood. Even in his dreams that night the name of Gertrude seemed to mingle. The next afternoon was bright and sunny, as he set off for the parsonage. The light that lay on the landscape had only gained in vividness from the touch of shade laid on here and there. He passed a little farmhouse, and in a meadow near shone a glassy pool, flashing like a mirror, and a flock of geese had risen from its margin, and led by a mother goose, of most goose-like solemnity, proceeded up the path, as if out for a constitutional. He happened to raise his eyes, and suddenly caught sight of the light figure of a young girl descending a winding path—a figure on which the light rested lovingly, as it rests on a water-lily. The thought suddenly struck him that that might possibly be the young lady of whose return he had heard the previous evening. "It must be," he said to himself, "as she comes straight from the direction of Avon Villa."

Yes, Harold, you are right in your conjectures so far, but you little think what a surprise is awaiting you,—that she is truly our beautiful Gertrude Heathcote, whom your dear father met at Nice. She is no longer a child, but a tall and stately maiden now, and, if possible, more beautiful than ever,—she looked so pure and cool in her pretty dress of silver grey, lightly trimmed with blue. The white feather of her hat rested on her dark, glossy hair; the sunshine streamed about her. She seemed to “walk in glory and in joy.” Her eyes shone their brightest, as she looked up at the blue above and down at the wealth of blossoms at her feet; her lovely face beamed with its brightest illumination. It was as if her young soul smiled back the smile of the Creator.

She met the flock of geese, who turned tail at her near approach, and waddled off in their ungainly fashion, and with much unreasonable cackling. At the pond they collected in a closer group, stretching their gossiping goose necks, and hissed insanely as she passed,—a feat which she rewarded by a happy little laugh. She passed the scattered cottages and farms of that small hamlet, and hastened on towards the parsonage. She had not seen Harold, who was walking slowly, not far behind her. While she was

still at some distance from the house, the entrance-gate was thrown open, and out ran Milley Hammond to meet her friend. She had on a hat, but neither cloak nor shawl, and her light dress fluttered as she advanced, with her own eager motion rather than with the breeze. The girls met, and kissed each other, and arm-in-arm they hastened to join the little party already assembled on the smooth, green lawn.

Flowery as Sicilian meads was the parsonage garden on that sunny afternoon, as Harold entered. The air was thick with perfume, as if some strong, daring south wind had blown wide the doors of a huge laboratory, and overturned the myriad alembics, and deluged the world with their fragrant and subtle distillations.

They had not begun their game, as Harold had anticipated, but sat waiting for his appearance. The many-coloured mallets and balls lay on the grass at their feet. The gentlemen, namely, Mr. Hammond and his friend, had strolled to the top of the garden, and were engaged in discussing some topic of the day, and the young ladies (especially Milley) were impatient for the commencement of the game. They sat in the sunshine, with a background of roses, which clustered all over the front of the house.

There were roses single and in pairs, roses by threes and fours, and half-dozens on a single spray, laying their heads together like girlish gossips. The girls did not lose a whit by that background of bloom. They were themselves as blooming as the flowers. Their light summer costume was as fresh and fair as themselves, and as they sat there ready for their favourite game, in their pretty little hats and coquettish boots, they looked like pretty birds who had plumed themselves from pure love of daintiness. The hats, with their white feathers, were all alike, but they were worn with a difference. Gertrude's with a sweet humility ; Milley's with a careless, roguish grace ; their friend, Miss Graham's, with a slightly imperious air. She would also choose her colours a shade brighter than the others, so that now bright hard blue predominated in her attire over Gertrude's greys, just lighted up with the same hue. Gertrude's dress also flowed round her in softer folds, and Milley's had the misfortune to soil and spoil the soonest.

"I do wish he would make haste," Milley was saying. "Oh, here he comes, at last! I am sure it is our new friend ;" and she hurried off towards her father and his friend (a curate from a distant parish), to call them to their posts on the lawn.

He advanced to meet Harold, bidding him a cordial welcome, and after the usual introductions were over, they all assembled for the game, which now began in good earnest. The afternoon was already somewhat advanced. The shadows of the elms were lengthening eastward on the grass. For the next hour or two there was much running and laughing, and prompting, and very little conversation.

Harold could scarcely conceal his astonishment at first sight of Miss Heathcote. Calling to mind his father's story, and the startling likeness to his dear sainted mother, he had now little doubt but that she was the Gertrude of whom his dear father had spoken in such affectionate terms. "Surely it must be the same," he said, suddenly remembering that she was called "the Rose of Avondale,"—and truly rightly named, he thought. As the game advanced, it was well that he was a skilful player, for his eyes and thoughts were constantly wandering after a certain fair form moving before him so light and gracefully.

It was a well-contested game. There were many skilful moves on both sides; many a ball neared its goal only to be sent to the furthest corner of the lawn by an expert enemy; or even at the winning-

post found it necessary to go back, in order to bring up lagging friends.

"It is easy for one to go on alone," said Mr. Payne (the curate), who had been unexpectedly successful ; "bringing up others is the hindrance."

And back he went to fetch up Gertrude and Milley, who had fallen into the hands of their enemies.

"It's very ungrateful of you to complain," said Laura Graham. "Think of the number of times I have had to bring you up."

"Ah, that's only human nature," said the curate, who seemed, however, to be enjoying his work.

"Besides, it would be no use winning alone," said Gertrude ; "that is, you could not win alone, but only put yourself out of the game."

"Ah, Payne, that's it," said Mr. Hammond ; "those who would win the race alone, leaving half the world behind them, will find that they have not won after all—have only put themselves out of the game, or else they will have to go back and bring up their fellows ; they will have to go generations back, if need be. It's one of the conditions of the game of life, that we can't win alone."


But this time Harold was on the winning side ; he and Laura and Mr. Hammond got the game. When



it was over the party repaired to a lovely arbour, where tea had been laid out. It was a charming spot, cool and shady, and the pretty arbour completely covered with roses and fragrant honeysuckle. Garden-chairs were found for the whole party, who seated themselves forthwith, while Milley and Gertrude handed the cups of tea.

Gertrude had withdrawn her gloves from her fair white hands, and as she chanced to pass a cup to Harold, he espied (as he remarked to himself) the crowning proof of her identity, namely, his dear father's parting gift, the gold ring with the precious stones. She has kept her promise, then, he thought. She little thinks I know the history of that ring. Some day she shall know, but for the present I will keep my secret.

By this time Harold felt quite at home amongst his new friends; his frank, easy manner, yet so respectful and gentlemanly withal, won for him golden opinions from all, especially the girls. It was a happy group, and his cheerful conversation seemed to enliven the whole party. They listened to tales of his life—his pretty home far away in the sunny south, till Milley's bright blue eyes widened, and a smile played round her rosy mouth, and now and then she would suddenly ask him a question,



with such sweet simplicity, that he felt pleasure in answering her. Then came tales of English home life in return. Thus they chatted on as if life were a summer holiday, and the shadows of the elms lengthened on the grass, and the western sky began to glow. Then Gertrude hastened to take leave of her friends, that she might be home in time for dinner.

Harold accepted Mr. Hammond's pressing invitation to stay and dine with them, and a happy evening he spent at that peaceful parsonage.

Mr. Hammond was not at all satisfied with Harold's present place of abode. "His landlady might do her best to make him comfortable," he said, "but he ought to have better accommodation than that humble house could offer." He said "he should feel proud and happy to shelter him under his roof during his stay at Avondale. He had rooms he could place at his disposal, where he could rest or study as he pleased, without fear of intrusion." At first Harold refused his kind offer; but Mr. Hammond begged him to come in such a kind, fatherly manner, that he feared it would wound his feelings to refuse. The kind old man pitied his loneliness from the bottom of his heart, and Milley's bright eyes filled with tears, as they listened to the

story of his mother's early death, and his gratitude to the two old faithful servants who so tenderly watched over his infancy ; and, lastly, the illness and death of his dear father, which left him now friendless. Even his mother's relations in Paris had, one by one, been laid in the grave ; but not one word did he breathe of his father's coldness and neglect. To no mortal ear would he tell the sorrow of his childhood. It was past now, and long since forgiven. At length he gratefully accepted Mr. Hammond's kind hospitality, and it was arranged that he should come to them the following afternoon. As he bade his friends Good-night, he assured them it had been one of the happiest days of his life.

As he walked home, thinking over the events of that day, he felt like one under the influence of some strangely bewildering dream, from which he would presently awake.

The next day all was bustle and preparation at that quiet parsonage. Milley was in ecstasies. A strange visitor coming to share their home for a time was quite an event. All that morning she was like a busy bee, flitting from flower to flower, superintending the necessary arrangements. The guest-chamber had been prepared, and Milley's pleasant school-room, seldom used now, was to be his study.

The arrangements were just completed, and Milley was taking a last look round, when two thoughts struck her, namely, that the books in the bookcase were not such as would interest a young gentleman like Mr. Fairlie, also that she might fill the lovely vases on the mantelpiece with flowers, thus adding to the bright freshness of the room.

Away she ran, catching up her little garden-basket and scissors, and was soon singing amongst the flower-beds. She suddenly heard the gate open, and looking up, she saw her dear friend, Miss Heathcote.

"Oh, Gertie, dear, I am so glad you are come. I was longing for you, but was too busy to come and fetch you ; your help will be invaluable to me just now. Mr. Fairlie is coming to stay with us for the present, so we have been busy making arrangements for his comfort and accommodation."

"But, my dear little Milley, what are you doing here, without hat or parasol, in all this scorching sun? You seem to have no fear of tanning your fair skin. I shall have to christen you our wild little gipsy," she said, playfully.

"My wise counsellor, I am sure you ought to have been named Minerva," she said, with a mock gravity on her merry face.

A hearty laugh and kiss was her only response, as Gertrude took her hand and led her off into the house at once. The flowers were soon tastefully arranged ; the suitable furnishing of the bookcase was the next consideration.

" Now, my dear Gertrude, I shall leave it entirely to your good taste and judgment to select from the library whatever books you think the most suitable. I certainly think these may go away," she said, laughing, as she gathered up an armful of picture-books, story-books, lesson-books, and girls' books of every description, fairy tales included ; and away she ran, and stowed them away in a cupboard, to be distributed to the village children on some future day. With Gertrude's help, the books were soon selected, and the shelves neatly and closely filled. Now nothing more remained to be done, but wait the arrival of their guest.

" Milley, dear," Gertrude said, " if it is fine to-morrow, mamma and I arranged to have a little picnic party amongst ourselves ; so I came to invite you and your father, and you must not fail to bring your visitor with you. The spot we have chosen is the top of the hill above our house, under the group of lime trees, where it is beautifully-smooth and grassy."

Milley joyfully accepted the invitation, and promised to bring the others, if possible.

As Gertrude rose to take her leave, she said, archly,—

“I suppose you could not prevail upon your friend, Mr. Payne, to join us, Milley?”

“I fear not,” she replied; “he always seems so overwhelmed with business.”

Gertrude noticed that the pink roses on her cheeks suddenly grew brighter than usual, and the blue eyes drooped before her earnest gaze, and with a woman’s quick instinct she drew her own conclusions.

She kissed her little friend, and bade her farewell till the morrow; and as she walked homeward, she said, with a sigh, “Dear Milley, I hope she will be happy.”

---

## CHAPTER VI.

## HOPES AND FEARS.

IT was late in the afternoon ere Harold reached the parsonage, and it was not until they were all three seated at dinner that evening that Milley told them of the proposed picnic, and soon obtained a promise from them both to accompany her. After dinner they wandered out into the garden, and paced backwards and forwards on the smooth, velvety lawn. Milley was leaning fondly on her father's arm, and chatting merrily to Harold, as he walked by her side.

Suddenly a quick footstep was heard on the gravel walk, and a cheerful voice wished them Good-evening.

"Who can it be?" asked Mr. Hammond, quickly.

Milley seemed strangely silent, and, it was well that the deepening twilight hid the blushes that suddenly suffused her cheeks; a strange fluttering at her heart at once told her who was the speaker. He apologized for his intrusion, but wishing to see Mr. Hammond on a matter of great importance, he



thought that now would be a likely time to find him at leisure. It was Walter Payne who spoke, and the two walked away to the house, and entered Mr. Hammond's quiet study, and closed the door behind them.

Harold noticed that the free and happy, laughter-loving Milley had suddenly grown strangely reserved and shy; she had ceased her walk, and stood leaning on the garden railings, looking away up that peaceful valley, with a very grave, thoughtful look on her usually merry face. Harold stepped in at the open drawing-room window, and fetched a light shawl from the sofa, and wrapped it about her pretty figure, saying,—

“The dew is falling fast, Miss Hammond, and I was afraid you might take cold.”

“Many thanks, Mr. Fairlie; you are very kind,” she replied; and Harold, thinking she might prefer solitude, returned to the drawing-room, and opened the piano, and soon strains of the richest melody filled the room, and floated out over the peaceful garden. Milley had wandered into a secluded walk, where the dark foliage of the trees met over her head; but she was not long alone. She was followed to the leafy nook she had chosen, and caught like a timid bird; and Walter spoke of himself and



of his aspirations, and how often they were chilled and quenched in the world, needing just such bright warm love as she could give to cheer his loneliness. And the girl who, as a child, had known and loved, and looked up to him, thrilled with wonder and tenderness, and the familiar home-garden changed in the starlight into that Eden which still awaits on innocent and happy love.

Milley and Walter lingered beneath the stars, and she listened to the fond reiteration of a passion which seemed to have suddenly transformed her life, till her fair head sank upon his shoulder, and her rosy cheeks were wet with happy tears.

Milley felt greatly relieved by the assurance that her dear father knew it already ; and when Walter led her back into the now lighted drawing-room, it was only to bid Good-night to his friends, promising to join them on the morrow.

Milley, too, was glad to steal away to her own room, and she noticed that it was with more than usual tenderness that her father gave his accustomed Good-night kiss, saying,—

“God bless my darling child !”

It was long before she could compose herself to sleep that night : she sat by the open window, gazing out on the moonlit lawn ; it seemed almost

like a happy dream, so new, so sweet, so strange, so sudden. But she devoutly believed in its heavenly origin, and took it as sent from God.

The next day was the very ideal of what a summer day should be—warm, bright, and still. It was too still and bright and cloudless for active outdoor enjoyment,—fitter, indeed, for

“ Soft slumberings in the open eye of Heaven,  
And all the listless joy of summer shades.”

But Gertrude liked better the soft grey days, when the skies are like dove-wings, only radiant for short moments, but infinitely tender in their light and shade. Mr. Payne was early at the parsonage; accordingly, the little party set off at once towards Avon Villa, up the winding footpath across the meadows, the nearest way into the high road, on the side of which the Villa was situated.

It was a lovely spot, overlooking the parsonage, and the peaceful valley, with its rich, fruitful orchards; and the woody-crested hills rose up grand and solemn in the distance.

They soon arrived at the Villa, and leaving the gentlemen in conversation on the lawn, Milley hastened into the house, in search of her friend. Peeping into the rooms down-stairs, and finding

them empty, she ran up to her room, and found her there.

"Ah, Gertie, dear, I am ready first, you see, and have succeeded in bringing three in my train."


"There's a darling Milley! I am so glad you have brought them; we shall enjoy it so much better now they are come, shan't we?"

Milley did not answer, but, stealing her arm round her friend's neck with unusual tenderness, she hid her blushing face on Gertrude's shoulder, and there breathed forth the shy confession of her happiness to that kind bosom friend, whose loving sympathy filled up the great need the heart has of being rejoiced with in its joy—a need far keener and deeper in most hearts than that of being wept with in sorrow, but one to which only the most tender and generous natures respond.

And Gertrude, holding her in her arms, kissed her lovingly, as she might have done a younger sister, saying,—

"God bless you, my dearest Milley, and may you be happy!"

Although the two girls were both the same age, Milley always looked up to the quiet, thoughtful Gertrude as an elder sister, her guide and counsellor, and sharer in all her little joys and sorrows.



They had grown up together from infancy, and Milley being left motherless when quite young, Gertrude used to have her a great deal at the Villa; and as Mrs. Heathcote used to tell her so often to be very kind and take great care of poor little Milley, as she had no dear mamma to watch over her, she felt very proud of her charge. Thus they grew up together, bound as it were with the cords of love. They descended the staircase, and met Mrs. Heathcote in the hall, and soon joined their friends in the garden. Gertrude was quite astonished at the sudden change in Walter Payne; it needed no words to tell her his happiness; there was a brightness in his full dark eyes, and a tender smile on his usually grave, serious face, such as she had never seen before. He was happy, and her whole heart rejoiced in the happiness of her friends. The little party now proceeded to climb the remainder of the hill above the Villa. On the level top of that height stood some magnificent lime-trees, perfect in form, and foliage. The servants carried up the repast, which everybody helped to spread under the central tree, dangling over their heads its thick-hung tassels of little, unopened blossoms; and resting beneath that tree, with a rich English landscape spread out below, in smiling nearness, made a rare com-

bination of natural delights to any one susceptible to these.

They finished their lunch, and sat some time afterwards, chatting merrily under the cool shade ; but Milley soon grew restless, and stole away to a flowery hedge on the brow of the hill, to gather her favourite bouquet, honeysuckle and wild roses.

Harold and Gertrude soon after followed her example, leaving the others in conversation with Mrs. Heathcote.

Milley stood by the thorny hedge, with her hand full of the fragrant blossoms, singing from pure gladness of heart, when a light breeze came sweeping over the hill, fanning her golden hair, and tossing off her pretty hat, just lightly resting on her head, and deposited it in the midst of the brambles, and in trying to reach it her thin dress became so entangled amongst the thorns, that in vain she tried to free herself.

Harold saw her difficulty, and called loudly,—

“Payne, my good fellow, yonder is beauty in distress ; why are you not at the rescue ?”

Harold was soon on the spot, and his strong friendly arm lifted her out of the reach of her thorny enemies.

“So you came here to gather wild roses, eh ? So

did I. Mr. Payne, I make you a present of my bouquet."

So saying, he placed Milley on the bank beside him, she laughing heartily at her adventure.

They spent a very happy day, wandering over that beautiful hill. Milley and Walter strolled off under the trees, Harold giving him strict instructions to take care of Milley, and keep her out of reach of the thorns' embraces. With the beautiful Gertrude at his side, how quickly the time seemed to fly! The hour for returning came much too soon; but as they were going to dine altogether at the Villa, Mrs. Heathcote pronounced it high time to depart, especially as other guests were expected. Mr. Hammond escorted the stately Mrs. Heathcote down the hill to the Villa, leaving the others to follow. Milley's hearty girlish enjoyment was infectious, and they all proceeded homeward as happy a party of young people as were to be found on that summer day.

At the Villa they separated. Mr. Hammond and his children (as he called them all three) returned to the parsonage to dress for the evening.

Milley told Harold who the expected guests were, while waiting in the drawing-room for her father.

"One," she said, "was Miss Graham, who had

just returned from London with her mother; and doubtless both would be there. Her godmother had just died, leaving her a large fortune; so Laura is a rich heiress now. The other one," she said, "is somebody you have never seen"; and going close to Harold, she whispered,—“It is no other than Mr. Francis Riversdale, the future husband of our dear Gertrude.”

He turned his head quickly to hide the flush that suddenly rose to his face, and glancing out of the window, replied, with seeming indifference,—

“Oh, indeed!”

“Yes,” Milley said; “and when you have seen him, I shall want you to tell me your candid opinion of him, and I will tell you mine.”

She then added very thoughtfully, as if speaking to herself,—

“Dear Gertrude! I am sure every one that knows her feels deeply interested in her future happiness. If I could only be sure that she really loves him, I would rest better satisfied, and try to like and respect him for her sake.”

“Which is telling me plainly that you do not like him now, Milley,” said Harold, laughing mischievously at her inability to reserve her opinion for his future hearing.

"Really, now, that is too bad," she said, shaking her pretty golden curls; "I did not mean to tell you yet; but there—I never can keep a secret, so pray never trust me with one. It is sure to come out at some unlucky moment, when I am least expecting it; it makes me feel quite angry sometimes."

But Harold was looking so exceedingly amused at the pretty little perplexed face before him, that Milley suddenly broke down in the midst of her anger, laughed heartily in spite of herself, and hastily drawing on her gloves, she exclaimed,—

"Here comes papa; now we are ready."

Milley was chatting merrily with her father during the drive, so that they did not notice Harold being unusually silent. He was thinking of Gertrude; also of what he had just heard.

The guests were assembled in the drawing-room when they reached the Villa (with the exception of Mr. Payne, who arrived just in time for dinner). The room was most tastefully arranged; rare exotics were blooming on a pretty green and gold flower-stand, also in the recesses, filling the air with their delicious fragrance. By the open window stood the tall, graceful figure of the beautiful Gertrude, her dark eyes full of mild tenderness, with truth in their clear depths; a face, once seen, never forgotten,



## THE ROSE OF AVONDALE.

...ming over the memory like a strain of sweet music. She held in her small white hands some strain of new music, and was turning over the leaves with a pensive smile. By her side stood a young and handsome man—handsome as far as a cold Grecian can be considered so. There was nothing but a beauty of form and feature in his face; no soul within there, no feeling or truth were in his eyes, nothing tender or loving in the haughty lips that gave so rarely. Yet the world called Francis Gertrude handsome; it courted him, too, although Gertrude ever true, had written a fair and honest warning on the proud face. As the only son and heir of Sir Archibald Riversdale, of St. Catherine's, where he was welcomed everywhere.

A bright flush suffused Gertrude's lovely face at the entrance of her friends, and she turned to meet them with a glad smile. Near her stood Miss Riversdale, most superbly dressed, her face of Spanish beauty looking prouder and more imperious than ever. Her mother was by her side, and both ladies had woven a net, in which they hoped to catch the son of St. Catherine's. As soon as dinner was over,

and they returned to the drawing-room, Milley begged Gertrude to sing for them, and having at last obtained her promise, they waited till the gen-

tle men joined them, when she seated herself at the piano, and soon the rich melody of her voice astonished her delighted hearers. No one was ever dull where Gertrude Heathcote presided; song succeeded glee, and her bright beautiful face seemed to make sunshine wherever she went. Francis was again at her side, turning over the leaves of music, with a smile of gratified vanity on his proud face. Milley and Walter were seated together at a little distance, while Harold was almost in the background. Milley's bright eyes had been watching him from time to time, but he was too intently gazing at Francis and Gertrude to notice her. She saw a scornful smile on his noble face, and glancing up at that moment, he caught her eyes fixed full on him, her merry face beaming with smiles, which seemed to say plainly,—“I am so glad we are both of the same opinion.”

Just at that moment Gertrude rose, and complaining of the heat of the room, stepped out on the lawn. Milley and several of the others rose to follow her example, for although it was getting dusk, it looked delightfully cool and tempting. Mrs. Graham called after Laura, in her usual fussy way, to take care not to walk on the grass, as the dews were fast falling; also to take a light wrap

for her shoulders, lest she might take cold. And Francis Riversdale went out into the hall to fetch a light wrapper, and hurried out to overtake her. Milley looked daggers at him, and fetching some more herself, gave one to Harold, who seemed at once to understand her meaning, and hastened out in search of Gertrude.

Mrs. Graham was favouring Mrs. Heathcote and Mr. Hammond with a full account of her plans for the future. She was about to make a long tour on the Continent, and probably return the following spring, and take a house in town, "for dear Laura's sake," she was saying. So the young people left her to her arrangements, and stepped out to enjoy the cool breeze on the lawn.

Milley and Walter found that Francis had strolled away with Laura, whose constant flow of talk seemed to form a wonderful attraction for him. Milley was glad to find Gertrude, not walking in solitude in consequence, but strolling down the gravel-path with Harold. They were evidently admiring the beauty of the garden by moonlight, as well they might. The evening was one of those which intoxicate the senses with loveliness. The full moon had risen, and was filling the garden with mystic light; the acacias at the gate looked like

trees of fairy-frosted silver, the cups of the tall lilies like so many alabaster lamps ; only the white flowers showed their hue, but the scents of all were mingled together in one divine essence.

At length they all returned to the drawing-room ; it was time to bid Good-night to their friends. As Francis's home lay just beyond that of the Grahams, and both would travel the same road, it seemed perfectly natural that he should accompany them home. But Milley caught the gleam of triumph in Laura's eyes as she looked towards Gertrude, so that with difficulty she concealed her indignation sufficiently to bid her friends Good-night. Harold proffered to walk down the field with Walter ; thus Milley drove back alone with her father. It was then she opened her mind to him, telling him her vexation.

"Laura is not like the same girl she used to be a little time ago ; I greatly fear her good fortune will spoil her disposition entirely."

"Alas, my child, it is too often the case ! I fear she has forgotten the text,—'If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.'"

---

## CHAPTER VII.

## GERTRUDE'S TROUBLE.

As the two young men descended the hill together, Harold could scarcely find words to express his admiration, the scene was so new to him. He had thought the moonlit garden lovely, but the meadows were the loveliest of all; through the tall uncut grass the ox-eye daisies shone with a wonderful weird beauty, such as they never wear by day. A new wonder thrilled them in the little wood. The moonbeams raining through and between the leaves, making them shine like emeralds, while from the distant part of the wood came the first notes of the nightingales, with their peculiar thrilling tenderness; they were answered by nearer ones, and both listened breathlessly while answer and reply, complaining, pleading, caressing, again and again and again repeated, made the little thicket ring. Once more all was silent, and they proceeded onward down the meadow path. In many places the grass was partly cut, and the air was filled with the sweet scent of the new-mown hay, while here and there a

pretty little glowworm might be seen, sparkling under the hedgerow ; and far away, up the valley, the owls had begun their mysterious hootings, now low and plaintive as the cry of some person in distress, now loud and shrill, as if to awaken the slumbering echoes.

At length they reached the parsonage, and found Mr. Hammond and Milley waiting for them at the hall door ; so, bidding his friends Good-night, Mr. Payne hastened homeward. Harold did not feel inclined to sleep ; he seated himself at a table, and drew from his breast a miniature—the miniature of his sainted mother, and resting his head on his hand, gazed at it long and tenderly, till tears shone in his kind blue eyes. Perhaps he was thinking of another beautiful face, so strongly resembling the painting he held—a face that unconsciously rose before him in his solitude, and visited him in his dreams. Presently he laid the miniature open on the table at his side, and commenced writing a long, kind letter to his dear old nurse.

It was past midnight ere he rose, and the silver beams of the fair crescent moon were streaming into the room through the open window. That same bright moon was hanging over the peaceful garden at Avon Villa, and shedding its mild rays

upon a different scene. Leaning out of one of the windows (round which the sweet-scented jessamine was waving) was the figure of a young girl, pale, but beautiful in the moonlight, looking at that moment far more like the lily than "the Rose of Avondale."

Poor Gertrude, she felt strangely sad; a vague trouble seemed to have filled her heart. After the guests had departed, her mother directly retired, and she was glad to seek her own quiet chamber, where, sitting at the window, with the cool air fanning her forehead, she could meditate undisturbed.

Her thoughts wandered back to her early, happy childhood, and tears blinded her eyes when she thought of the dear, kind father, who had been her guide and counsellor in all things, now lost to her for ever in this world. Mr. Heathcote loved his child with a proud, fond affection, that no words can express. From day to day and year to year, he noticed her, as she grew in beauty and grace, until his whole heart was bound up in her. He spared neither money nor trouble over her education; accomplished governesses were found for her; masters of high class and great talent came to her home. It was more for his daughter's sake

than his own failing health, that he had given up all the settled habits of his life, and taken Gertrude abroad—taken her to the sunny cities of fair France and beautiful Italy.

On an estate near to Avon Villa lived Sir Archibald Riversdale, an old friend of Mr. Heathcote's, and both fathers agreed that if their children could be married it would be a very desirable affair.

Mr. Heathcote was then a wealthy, influential merchant, possessing a splendid mansion at Clifton, near Heathcote Manor House (his birthplace, inherited by his elder brother), thus only enjoying Avon Villa during the delightful summer months.

Gertrude was his sole heiress ; thus they wished to join her wealth to the estate of St. Catherine's Court. The mother was even more anxious than they, and she thought with a glow of pride of the time when her daughter would be Lady Riversdale, wife of one of the wealthiest men in the county.

Mr. Heathcote told Gertrude of his hopes and plans, and then introduced Francis Riversdale to her as her betrothed husband.

The young heiress decidedly refused to consider him as such.



"I do not love him, papa, and never can," she said.

"You are too young," said the merchant, "to know much about love. We will let matters stand over for a year or two; but, in the meantime, I beg that you will consider Francis Riversdale as your future husband. My great wish is to see you Lady Riversdale," he said, laying his hand fondly on his child's head.

"It will be all no use, papa, as you will see," she said, smiling through her tears.

And it was no use. With a look of gratified vanity on his handsome face, Francis Riversdale went to the Villa every day. He was proud of his position, and liked to know that the prettiest girl and wealthiest heiress in the county side was to be his. People congratulated him, his friends envied him, and he took great airs of proprietorship upon himself, which often drove Gertrude to the verge of distraction.

It was about this time that they again visited the Continent, and Gertrude felt glad to escape for a time the unwelcome attentions of Francis Riversdale. She loved her father too dearly to make him unhappy by what might seem her obstinate refusal,—his wishes were sacred to her; but in her secret

heart she resolved never to marry Francis: thus she left it all to time and Providence, and set sail to those distant lands with a glad heart—glad for the present, at least, to leave its trouble behind it, and determined, more than ever, to devote herself to her dear father's happiness and comfort. She saw with sorrow that his health was now only too surely beginning to fail; but her young heart rose buoyant with bright hopes of his speedy recovery.

Thus it was that Gertrude and her father met Mr. Fairlie in the beautiful garden at Nice, as we have already recorded.

It was still early in the morning when the fatal message arrived at the hotel, bearing the news of Mr. Heathcote's loss and his clerk's treachery.

Mrs. Heathcote was completely overwhelmed, therefore totally unable to give her husband the comfort and consolation of which he stood so much in need. Her proud heart was too surely founded on this world's riches and greatness, and which, like the house upon the sands, had suddenly fallen, and, for a time, seemed to have buried her beneath the ruins.

Always devotedly attached to her father, Gertrude's love seemed to have increased in this his deep sorrow. Every noble gift and attribute of her

race seemed to have descended to her—dauntless courage, clear, sound judgment. She was no longer the gay laughing girl; it was a thoughtful woman who stood by the merchant in this dire hour of distress, giving him fresh strength and courage.

“Gertrude, I am a ruined man,” he said, despairingly, gazing up into her face with such a look of anguish that she could not bear, and throwing her arms round his neck, kissed him again, and again, saying,—

“I and mamma are still left to you; I will never, never leave you, my own dear father.”

He then spoke of the immediate necessity of their return. Mrs. Heathcote was indulging in a fit of passionate weeping, as if the trouble was really all her own, without bestowing word or look at the other two sufferers at her side.

Gertrude interpreted her father's helpless, sorrowful looks, and said,—

“Dear papa, do not fear; leave all the arrangements to me.”

“Are you brave enough for that?” he asked.

“I can be strong and brave for your sake, dear papa; let me be your comfort, too, in this dark hour.”

He looked up at the beautiful face bending over

him ; it was calm and serene, and he seemed to gather strength and courage from it—strength to bear that sad homeward journey bravely.

Thus in the suddenness and anxiety of their departure, it was no wonder that their friend, Mr. Fairlie, was forgotten until they had started on their journey ; it was Gertrude who then remembered him, and they proposed writing to him as soon as they landed at Dover. Alas ! they little knew what was before them when they arrived there. Mr. Heathcote was taken alarmingly ill, and was conveyed with all possible haste to an hotel, and placed on a bed, from which he never rose.

Poor man ! the sudden shock had been too great for him, and brought on a fatal heart disease, that hurried him into his grave.

His clerk was a man whom he had known and trusted for many a year, respected by all who knew him, and one in whom he had ever reposed the greatest confidence, and very deeply he felt the cruel breach of trust.

The loss of her dear husband seemed effectually to arouse Mrs. Heathcote from the state of selfish grief into which she had fallen in their first trouble. The sight of her daughter's anguish and sorrow touched her heart, and anxious to spare her feelings

as much as possible, she wrote immediately for Mr. Heathcote's only brother, from Heathcote Manor, to come to their assistance ; next, to Francis Riversdale ; and, lastly, a few hurried lines to Mr. Fairlie, in which she had forgotten to enclose her address, or any that he could be likely to trace her by.

Squire Heathcote no sooner received the letter than he proceeded to Dover without delay. His kind heart bled for these two suffering helpless women, and he strove in every possible way to be a comfort to them in that dark hour. Mrs. Heathcote felt thankful that Gertrude's future was provided for—she had been thinking it all over in her mind how Francis would try to persuade her to consent to a speedy, quiet marriage, in order to spare his darling the pain of altered circumstances.

"If that be the case, Gertrude, I urge you to comply," she said ; "half the smart of my sorrow would leave me if I once saw you at St. Catherine's Court."

Gertrude would not, by one word, distress her mother, although she longed to cry out that she could never marry Francis Riversdale ; but she would not grieve her,—she had enough to bear. Then she would talk no longer. "They could arrange nothing," she said, "until they knew Francis's

plans." A quiet but meaning smile lingered on the beautiful face of Gertrude. She understood the character of the handsome heir of St. Catherine's far better than her mother did. She had an instinctive idea as to what his plans would be.

Mrs. Heathcote felt very uneasy as the days passed by, and brought not one word of sympathy or consolation from Francis Riversdale.

At length the anxiously expected letter arrived. Mrs. Heathcote tore open the envelope, and quickly read over the contents. It was a short, formal letter, coldly expressing his sorrow at their trouble and sudden bereavement. It was evidently intended as a letter of condolence to herself and daughter, but the writer had certainly failed in the attempt. A blank look of disappointment overspread her face as she read it over a second time; to be sure, she had read it aright, looking in vain for the words she had fondly hoped to see. At last she tried to believe him too much overwhelmed to express all he would otherwise have said. She could not allow herself to think him cold and indifferent.


"Well, mamma," Gertrude said, going up to her; "and what does your favourite say? He is heart-broken at our misfortunes, no doubt."

"He says little, my dear," replied Mrs. Heathcote,

quietly. "Some men, you know, feel much without knowing how to express it."

If she had looked more closely into her daughter's face she would have seen there a half-doubtful smile ; but Mrs. Heathcote was troubled and dismayed, and Gertrude left her to her own reflections, herself glad to put Francis Riversdale entirely out of her thoughts. Her heart was too heavy and sorrowful to calmly lay plans for the future, as her mother had done. Little would her noble, unselfish spirit have cared for the loss of earthly riches, if it had pleased God to spare her dear father ; but such was not His will, and at first she felt completely crushed by the sudden blow, and there was an aching void in her heart, which nothing could then fill. Not so with Mrs. Heathcote ; all her sorrows and trials had failed to crush the old haughty pride, which showed itself again in ambition for her daughter's future.

Mr. Heathcote's beloved remains were carried back to Clifton, to his own home, Heathcote Hall, and laid in the ancient churchyard, where slept his noble ancestors of many a bygone year. Squire Heathcote (after the funeral was over) kindly sheltered his dear brother's widow and child in his own home until their affairs could be settled.



Another letter reached them from Francis Riversdale, expressing his sorrow at not being able to visit them in their affliction, as his father had been ordered abroad for the benefit of his health, and, of course, he should accompany him, but hoped to visit them immediately on his return, which would be, probably, in a few months.

Mrs. Heathcote was vexed and disappointed, but Gertrude felt truly thankful.

It was long before poor Gertrude could fairly rouse herself back to life, with its hard trials and stern realities ; but at length she found strength and comfort, and balm for her heart's deep sorrow. In her lonely hours of silent grief she sometimes fancied she could hear her dear father's voice, saying,—

“Weep not for me, my daughter ; but rather say, Thy will be done.”

She would then open her little Bible, and read over portions she had so often read to him, and the blessed words seemed to fall like oil on the troubled waters of her sorrowing soul, and praying for strength in her hour of need, she felt her prayers had not been in vain, and was comforted ; and when by degrees she tried to resume her life of usefulness,



it was only a little calmer, a little sadder she went on her way.

Patient and resigned in all things, she strove to be a comfort and support to her widowed mother.

It was some time before their worldly affairs were settled. They found that their princely mansion must be given up. It was a hard trial to both to part with the dear old home, but Gertrude bore it bravely, without a murmur. The kind old Squire insisted on their remaining with him until all was finished. Heathcote Hall passed into other hands—some nobleman bought it, who was just setting out on a long voyage, intending to settle there on his return. Thus they were spared the pain of seeing others there for a time, as the house was shut up. Gertrude and her mother had removed many little articles of value, and old treasures and family relics, also a large painting of Mr. Heathcote, and sent them to Avon Villa, which was now their only home.

They found, when all was paid (with the sale of the estate), they still had a fortune left sufficient to maintain them in comfort and ease.

When they returned to the Villa, Francis Riversdale was again constantly at her side. She found it very trying to endure his unwelcome presence ;

but her mother seemed more anxious than ever to encourage him there.

Thus the time passed on calmly, until Harold Fairlie visited them; and on this particular evening, as Gertrude sat gazing out on the moonlit lawn, many thoughts crowded themselves upon her mind—thoughts of the present, past, and future.

The future! “What of that?” She could scarcely bear to think sometimes. If Francis had been noble, and generous, and sympathizing, how gladly she would have poured out her whole heart to him,—how gladly she would have given him that priceless love, with which her tender heart was overflowing.

But to her that was impossible; she could only feel towards him the strongest contempt and dislike.

Since Laura Graham had become rich, she had watched the increasing attentions Francis had bestowed upon her, and a new hope seemed to rise in her heart, although she almost feared to indulge it, in case it might only be a delusion; but time would prove.

She thought of dear Milley’s new-found happiness,—not that she envied her, she was far too generous for that; but it only seemed to make her lot more cheerless and lonely in contrast. Poor Gertrude

was only mortal, and for a time she wept long and bitterly. Thoughts of her dear father presently checked her tears—thoughts of the happy hours they spent together at Nice ; and as she glanced at the beautiful ring on her finger, glistening in the bright moonbeams, she wondered what had become of the kind old gentleman who placed it there ; she thought of his parting words, and wished he was near to give her advice and consolation now.

At last she sought her pillow, and was soon asleep and dreaming she was back again in the beautiful garden at Nice, with her dear father and their friend, Mr. Fairlie ; she thought she had been reading to them in their favourite summer-house, and as she finished, Mr. Fairlie took her hand, and drew her towards him, and tenderly kissing her forehead, said,—

“ May Heaven bless you, Gertrude, my own sweet child, my daughter ! ”

With these words still ringing in her ears, she awoke, and found it was only a dream, but a very happy one, and it comforted her.

The bright summer days passed on, and August came, and still Harold lingered with his kind friends, feeling that the happiest days of his life were those he had spent at the dear old

parsonage. He wrote often to his two faithful old servants at the Château (fearing they might feel it lonely in their old age), but their answers were always hopeful and cheerful. "All things were going on smoothly and prosperous," they used to say; "hoping he was benefiting by the change, which he so much needed, although they would be glad to welcome him home again;" and he knew they were happy and contented. He had proposed to return to the Château in September, but Mr. Hammond and Milley at last prevailed upon him to remain with them till October. Busy lives they led those long summer days—busy as the bees that flitted through that sunny garden; and no one was more ready than Harold to lend a helping hand wherever one was needed. He would often walk round the outskirts of the parish, visiting the sick and reading to them for the aged pastor, leaving him to visit those near home, to spare him the fatigue of such long walks; and many a widow's heart he made glad, and many a helpless sufferer had reason to be thankful that he came amongst them. Kind and sympathizing, he was ever ready to minister to their wants, and was soon beloved alike by young and old.

Gertrude and Milley found him invaluable, as he

assisted them in so many ways, especially in their Sunday-school.

Greatly did he enjoy those happy, blessed Sabbaths: they seemed to shed a peaceful calm upon his soul, that remained there through all his after-life

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

## PLEASANT RAMBLES.

THE three friends often took long morning rides together, making quite a tour round that beautiful picturesque neighbourhood. One place in particular was their favourite resort, and if Milley was asked where they should go, she was sure to say, eagerly, "Oh, do let us have a gallop over the Downs." "The Downs," as it was called, was an immense common, situated at some distance up the high road above the Villa : the summit was like a beautiful smooth green plain, bounded on one side by the high road, and stretched far away down a sloping hill-side into a distant valley. All over the common hawthorn trees grew in abundance, and when, in the month of May, they were in full bloom, it was a picture truly beautiful to behold, while here and there the tall rushes marked the course of a little wandering stream. The yellow-blossomed furze, too, grew in patches, and pretty little ant-hills were dotted here and there, covered with wild thyme.

The view from the summit of the Downs was most magnificent, especially on a clear day. The air, too, was so fresh and bracing ; and as the young friends galloped over the breezy common, their happy faces were a pleasant sight to look upon. Harold used to think that Gertrude never looked more beautiful than when riding over the Downs, with her dark glossy ringlets flying in the breeze, and a bright flush suffusing her lovely face.

As for Milley, she looked charming and saucy as ever, and her happy, silvery laugh floated far away on the morning breeze.

Pleasant rambles, too, they often took together ; sometimes Walter Payne would lay aside his duties and cares to join them, but generally the three friends went alone. They were all very fond of sketching, and seated under some cool, shady tree, thus they passed many a happy hour. Harold was quite a proficient in their favourite art, and the two girls looked up to him almost as their teacher ; and a very kind, patient teacher they found him too. They seemed as though they would never tire of looking at his beautiful collection, all the works of his own hands. There was the Château, his beautiful home in the sunny south ; there, too, was the old grey church ; also separate sketches of the font, and every-



thing of interest that the church contained. But the one they best loved was a large drawing of the beautiful marble tomb. They questioned and admired, and Harold answered and explained, until at length the history of each object became familiar to them.

One lovely afternoon they set out for a stroll. The fields were fast ripening for harvest; the gentle breeze bowed the golden ears of corn and fluttered the scarlet poppies; the cattle in the meadows were enjoying the cool shade of the spreading oak and the leafy ash, dreamily shutting their eyes, and lashing their huge sides with their tufted tails, vainly endeavouring to rid themselves of the myriads of flies that swarmed around them.

They left the peaceful valley of Avondale, and wandered on until they entered another, equally peaceful and lovely, called St. Catherine's Vale. They walked along the cool, shady lane, with its tall green hedge-rows and high mossy banks (in some places covered with wild strawberries), while here and there the tall branches met above their heads, spreading over the lane, forming a cool, leafy canopy.


On one side flowed the waters of a little sparkling brook; crossing the lane at intervals, it danced



along, now on this side, now on that, until it mingled its waters with a larger stream. Now and then they reached a little opening, sometimes a gateway, giving them a glimpse of the grand old hills towering above them: the ascent was so steep in many places that steps had been cut in the turf, to enable people to climb them with safety. Presently they left the shady lane and entered a lovely meadow, at the bottom of which flowed a broad, clear stream, and on the other side of it was a large orchard, with its delicious fruits fast ripening in the summer sun, and directly opposite them stood the pretty little romantic-looking Church of St. Catherine's, with its grey tower just peeping above the tall old trees that closely surrounded it. They followed the windings of the rippling stream until they came to a pretty wooden bridge,—

Where graceful willows grow askant the brook,  
And show their hoar leaves in the glassy stream.

For some time they stood upon the little bridge, chatting merrily, and, leaning over the hand-rail, gazed down into the clear, cool water, where reflected, almost as in a mirror, they beheld their own happy faces. They watched the fishes darting in the stream, and the rapid flight of the dragon-fly, as



it glanced in and out of the willows, and spread its gay-coloured wings in the sunshine.

Milley suddenly looked up at Harold, and exclaimed,—

“Can any place be more beautiful than this lovely, peaceful valley? I have never found aught to be compared with it. Other places may surpass it in beauty to the experienced eye of a traveller like yourself, Mr. Fairlie, but in my eyes nothing can be more beautiful than the hills and vales that surround my own dear home.”

“It is truly beautiful, and well deserves your praise, Miss Hammond,” he said; “and I can truthfully assert, that the happiest hours of my life have been spent in these peaceful solitudes, and on the dear old hills that surround Avondale.”

He glanced at Gertrude’s lovely face as he spoke, and for a moment their eyes met, but hers quickly drooped before his tender gaze, and a deep blush suffused her beautiful face; and he thought at that moment she was, indeed, “the Rose of Avondale.”

“I have often longed to visit the Continent,” Milley said, eagerly. “I do hope I may some day have my wish gratified; but I must wait patiently, I suppose,—wait and hope.”

“A delightful place to spend a honeymoon,” Mr.


Fairlie said, glancing mischievously at her. "What do you say, Miss Heathcote?"

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Fairlie; it is a delightful place to visit, especially on such a happy occasion."

"Miss Hammond," said Harold, suddenly, "a bright idea has just entered my head. When you are Mrs. Walter Payne, if all is well, you shall have your wish. Of course, you will leave home for a few weeks; when could you have a better opportunity of visiting the Continent than then? There is the Château de Beauville. I should only be too happy to bid you welcome to my pleasant home; and I am sure Madame Ernond, too, would be delighted to entertain my little friend and her husband, and strive to her utmost to make her visit a comfortable and happy one. Nay, do not turn away your blushing face, little lady, for in this I must not be disappointed; so, with your dear papa's consent, I hope you will make me happy by accepting my invitation."

She raised her bright blue eyes to his, and strove to express her grateful, happy thanks, but he stopped her, by saying,—

"How soon is the wedding to take place, Miss Hammond?"



"It is not quite settled yet, Mr. Fairlie," she said; "but you shall know immediately it is decided, as we hope to have the pleasure of your company whenever it may be; and if dear Gertie is not married first, she will be my chief bridesmaid," she said, looking up fondly at her friend.

But Gertrude did not answer; her eyes were fixed intently in the stream: a sad, troubled look overspread her beautiful face. Harold saw it, and wondered why it was there. Somehow the words fell like a chill upon his heart; and, anxious to break the silence that had suddenly fallen on them, he said,—

"I shall be looking forward with much pleasure to this important visit of yours, Miss Hammond; it will be quite an event at the peaceful Château."

"Really, Mr. Fairlie," Milley said archly, "I greatly fear my wild, wayward conduct will quite shock poor Madame Ernond's notions of propriety. I must beg of you to help me from this time forth to settle down, and I must endeavour to become quite civilized, and even ladylike."

Both the friends laughed heartily at Milley's new dilemma, and thought how almost impossible it seemed for her ever to "settle down," as she called

it. Like some bright butterfly, she seemed always on the wing.

"Madame Ernond is a dear, kind creature, and I think you will have nothing to fear from that quarter, Miss Hammond, provided your conduct is not very desperate," he said, with mock gravity.


Milley looked up with a saucy, winning smile, as she said,—

"You dear, kind Mr. Fairlie, I long to tell papa and Walter of your generous invitation. I am sure they will be delighted."

"I know you will be quite charmed with the beauties of the Continent, Milley dear," said Gertrude; "I have spent some happy hours there, and the memory of them will ever be very dear to me."

Again there was a pause, and Harold thought of the time when this same beautiful girl had wandered by the side of his dear father, ministering to his little wants, like some good angel. He thought, would she never mention the name of her old friend—never mention the story of the ring, or its giver? When at last it came suddenly, he was scarcely prepared for it.

It was Milley's merry voice that broke the silence saying,—



"Why are you looking so serious, Gertie, dear. Of what are you thinking, may I ask?"

"My dear Milley, to speak the truth, I was just then thinking of a dream I had last night. I think I may say I am not in the least given to superstition, yet it seems very strange that I have three times dreamed the selfsame thing."

"Do tell us what it was, Gertie," Milley said.

So, standing there on the little rustic bridge, she related to them the dream respecting Mr. Fairlie in the garden at Nice, already known to our readers.

"How very strange!" exclaimed Milley.


"Very strange indeed!" echoed Harold, trying to look unconcerned.

"Perhaps you may soon have some tidings of your friend, or even meet him at some unexpected moment. You said he was of English birth. He may possibly be in England at this present time," said Milley.

"I fear not, Milley," Gertrude replied; "he has lost all trace of us, as we of him; but he must have received mamma's letter, informing him of the sudden death of poor dear papa. But as the address was forgotten, in the trouble and excitement, he would be unable to reply. I cannot tell you how

pleased I should be to see him again ; but sometimes I fear that he, too, has passed away from this world of sorrow and suffering. If he were still alive, and in health, I think he would have spared neither trouble nor expense to seek us, as he had so often kindly invited us to his home, and we had partly accepted his invitation, and he had assured poor papa that if anything would tempt him to cross the Channel again, it would be the pleasure of paying us a visit. We knew little of his past history, only that some heavy sorrow had darkened his life, and aged him beyond his years ; but we were all so happy there, even his sorrow was for a time forgotten. We little dreamed our friendship would have such a sad and sudden ending. In this world, I fear, we shall never meet again, but I trust we shall in Heaven," she said reverently, her lovely dark eyes filling with tears. The sight of her tearful face, and her anxiety to learn tidings of his father, was almost too much for poor Harold ; his heart beat wildly with emotion, and it cost him a severe struggle to retain the secret he longed to disclose. "She shall know some day, but not yet," he always said to himself.

They crossed the rustic bridge, at each end of which was a small wooden gate, placed there to



prevent the cattle from crossing, and closing it behind them, they seated themselves on a green mossy bank, beside the stream.

They still talked of those happy days at Nice, and then, for the first time, Gertrude told Harold the whole history of her beautiful ring, told him what he had already heard from his dear father's own lips. He gazed at the precious gem (as he had often done in secret) with tender admiration. She drew it from her finger, and placed it in his hand, and on examining it, there surely enough, at the bottom of the inscription, was his dear father's initials, "H. F." After gazing at it a few moments, he took her hand, and tenderly replaced the ring on her finger. His hand trembled as he did so, and she suddenly raised her mild eyes to his—"Was it fancy? it must have been," she thought; but somehow, there was a look in his eyes at that moment that strongly recalled the kind old gentleman who had first placed it there.

Harold saw the look of surprise and inquiry on her beautiful face, and fearing lest he might unconsciously betray his secret, he said quickly,—

"So you have faithfully kept your promise, Miss Heathcote, and worn the precious gem in affectionate remembrance?"



"Yes, Mr. Fairlie," said Milley, answering for her friend. "If you only knew Gertrude as well as I do, you would know that she holds a promise as sacred, and would not knowingly break one for the world; and I have no doubt but that she will continue to wear that beautiful keepsake to the end of her life, even though she may never again behold the giver."

"Cease, my little flatterer," said Gertrude, fondly; "do not raise me to such an elevation in your esteem, lest contrary winds arise, and I should be suddenly blown down."

"Spoken just like your own dear self," said Milley; "ever modest and ready to slip into the background at the least notice, yet none more fitting to shine than 'my bright leading star.' Pardon me, Gertie dear, but you know I always like to speak my mind."

Gertrude threw her arm lovingly round her friend, and declared it was high time for them to return home, or they would certainly be late for dinner. "And you know I never like to keep mamma waiting," she said.

So with that they slowly retraced their steps along the cool shady lane, and parting with Gertrude, they reached the parsonage as the tall trees

were casting long shadows across the smooth green lawn.

Harold felt strangely excited as he thought over the disclosures of the past day; but it had been a very happy day, and many more such quickly followed in its train.

---

## CHAPTER IX.

## FIRST LOVE.

HAROLD'S two young friends had gradually become very dear to him.

With the frank and open-hearted Milley he always felt quite at home, and perfectly at his ease ; but Gertrude—the gentle, pious Gertrude—he felt it was a far different feeling that burned within his breast towards her.

It was long before he dared own, even to himself, that he loved her. As the betrothed of another, she seemed as far removed from him as the sun from the stars.

“But did she really love Francis Riversdale?” was the question he sometimes asked himself. “If she did, he would go away at once and for ever ; if not, might he not hope to win her—might she not learn to love him in time?”

August was fast drawing to its close ; the twenty-eighth was Milley's birthday, which was to be celebrated with all due honours.

When the morning came the sun arose bright

and clear, chasing away the white mist that hung over hill and dale.

It was still quite early when Harold arose, and softly descended the staircase, quitting the house by a side door. Everything was peaceful and still. The dew lay heavy on the grass, and sparkled like diamonds on the sprays and flowers, as the fresh breeze waved them in the morning sunlight. He passed slowly round the corner of the house, and as he came in sight of the front door he was surprised to see it softly opened, and Milley stepped out on the lawn, fresh as the morning, in her pretty cambric dress and simple straw hat, with the bright sunlight falling on her hair.

Her blue eyes widened with glad surprise as she caught sight of Harold, who hastened towards her, and welcomed her with delight.

It was pleasant to have a companion when he had expected to spend an hour or two alone, and he was at no loss to express his pleasure, and heartily wished her "Many, many happy returns of the day." They went the round of the place, sauntering side by side.

"What a delightful morning for a ride over the Downs," exclaimed Milley, with delighted eagerness ; "do let us go, Mr. Fairlie."

"With pleasure, Miss Hammond," he replied. "It is just the morning to enjoy a ride; the fresh breeze is so invigorating."

"I must run back to get my habit, though," Milley said, glancing down rather ruefully at her light morning costume; "but very quietly, for fear of disturbing dear papa."

"I will have the horses ready by the time you return, and we will mount outside the gate," Harold said, hastening off towards the stables.

They were ready, too, by the time Milley came back, and gathering up her skirt, she ran out of the gate. Harold's horse—a beautiful black, spirited animal—was already impatient to be off, and stood scraping up the turf with one foot, while its companion stood quiet and docile as a lamb. Harold had one arm thrown fondly round its neck, and was talking to it most affectionately.

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Fairlie; that is not my horse," Milley said, looking very much astonished.

"But it is mine, though, Miss Hammond; and I should esteem it as a great favour if you will kindly try this one instead of your own, this morning," Harold said.

"Certainly I will, if you think it safe," Milley said.

---

"It is perfectly safe, rest assured, or I would not let you venture," he replied.

"What a superb creature," said Milley; "I never in my life saw such a splendid, noble-looking animal! But how gentle it seems, and so affectionate! I shall mount it without the least fear."

She let fall the folds of her riding-skirt, as she clasped her hands in admiration, and lavished upon it the most extravagant praises. Harold assisted her to mount, but her light elastic form needed little help, and he sprang quickly into his own saddle, and they were off.

There were many pleasant sights and sounds abroad, that lovely summer's morning. The reapers were busy in the harvest fields, and the sound of the sickle came floating on the breeze. But Milley had no thoughts to bestow on anything that morning but the beautiful horse, that carried her with such graceful, easy action. She leaned over, and fondly patted its beautifully arched neck with her little white hand, and declared she was quite in love with it already.

She had praised and admired it, to Harold's extreme satisfaction. That was what he had wished for, and he gazed at her with a pleasant smile, as he said,—

"I am proud and happy to think it meets with your approval, Miss Hammond ; it is yours. May I ask if you will accept it as a birthday gift ? It is with your father's sanction that I offer it, and I and Mr. Payne have been training it for weeks past. He only brought it here last evening."

Milley looked at first much astonished, as if she almost doubted the evidence of her senses, but she soon found words to express her grateful thanks ; in fact, she seemed almost wild with delight.

"I must go at once to show Gertrude my beautiful prize," she said. So they turned their horses' heads in the direction of the Villa.

Gertrude was in the garden, gathering her choicest flowers, to arrange in the vases upon her mamma's writing-table, so that they should look fresh and pretty when she came down-stairs. Presently the sound of horses' hoofs and happy voices caught her ear, and looking up, she recognized her friends, and hastened to meet them. A rosy blush overspread her face as Harold gracefully lifted his hat, and wished her "Good-morning."

As she glanced up at his companion, she looked surprised and astonished beyond measure, so that Milley laughed heartily at her "pretty puzzled face," as she called it.

She then told Gertrude all about it, and they both patted and admired it to their hearts' content, and Harold waited by in silence. For the moment he seemed lost in admiration, too—admiration almost amounting to worship. But a very different idol was his. In vain he tried to persuade himself that he loved the beautiful girl before him "only as a friend." His heart beat wildly, and his kind voice often faltered now when he spoke to her; but he struggled to disguise his feelings. They bade Gertrude adieu, and hastened back to breakfast, Milley having obtained her promise to join them in an hour or two. The bell was ringing for prayers as they entered the parsonage. Mr. Hammond kissed his child affectionately, as she took her accustomed place at his side. As soon as prayers were over, she ran up to her own room to take off her habit; and when she came down to preside at the breakfast-table, it was difficult to say which of the three wore the happiest face that morning. Soon after breakfast Gertrude came, and the three friends spent a very happy morning. Mr. Payne came to lunch, so Harold and Gertrude were left much to themselves that afternoon; but Gertrude left early, as there was to be quite a large gathering at Avon Villa that night, in honour of Milley's birthday.



Mr. Hammond had wished it to be kept at home, but Mrs. Heathcote, not being very strong just then, had begged that it might be celebrated at her own home, otherwise she would be unable to attend; and, as usual, she had carried her point. It was truly a gay gathering at the Villa that evening; friends from far and near had accepted the invitation; merry groups of both old and young filled the pretty drawing-room.

Milley accompanied her father in the carriage, while Mr. Fairlie and Mr. Payne walked up together. Francis Riversdale was there, and had taken his old place, as a matter of course, by Gertrude's side. She looked beautiful as a dream, and it was quite evident that more than one or two were of opinion that the fairest flower in the room was "the Rose of Avondale." She was completely surrounded, and Harold was obliged to content himself with "gazing from afar," while she was chatting merrily, now to one, now to another, with perfect self-command and graceful ease. At dinner, too, she was seated far from him. He was placed between two young ladies (evidently sisters), who talked incessantly, and for the sake of politeness he was obliged to answer them, and try to make himself agreeable.

Poor Harold! he thought he never felt more

disagreeable, or less inclined to talk in his life. Once he looked up and caught sight of Milley's blue eyes fixed on him with a look of inquiry, but he hastily summoned a smile, and she seemed satisfied.

As soon as dinner was over, one of Harold's talkative young ladies proposed a game of their favourite croquet. There was still light enough, and the lawn looked very tempting. She was warmly seconded by Francis Riversdale, at whom Milley cast an angry frown, as she swept past him. So leaving the elder ones to converse in the drawing-room, the young people soon commenced their game. Harold was at first singularly unfortunate, while Francis Riversdale's reckless performances were carrying him and his partner to the goal. When Harold was next called upon, he found a grim satisfaction in sending Frank's ball to the furthest corner of the lawn, where it bounded off and into the shrubbery. It was getting dusk, so that the ball could not be found, and Milley rather impatiently desired to quit the game. They all gave it up at once, quite good-humouredly, but no one felt inclined to go in-doors, so they strolled round the pleasant garden. Some filled the summer-house, some the arbours and conservatory ; but Harold,

with folded arms, walked off silently to the most secluded spot he could find. Presently he heard a light footstep behind him, and saw a little white hand laid upon his arm. Its owner was Milley, who stood beside him, smiling and happy.

"Sir knight of the doleful countenance," she said, playfully, "why are you here? Is there nothing in this pleasant scene, no pleasant faces to make you glad?"

"Milley," he said, "I shall be miserable if Gertrude Heathcote marries this fellow."

He spoke with sudden desperation, as if it was impossible longer to conceal his secret.

"You love Gertrude, then?" she said, clasping her hands, and looking up with delighted eagerness.

"Yes," he whispered; "I never knew how much till now. I feel as if life would be worthless without her."

"I feel sure she does not love Mr. Riversdale," she said; "the parents and he seem to have made it up between them, without reference to Gertrude, so pray take courage, and hope that all may end happily. Let me be the first to offer you my heartfelt wishes for your success." She spoke with her usual playfulness, and looked up, smiling. "I am so very glad," she said again. "I wonder I have

never guessed it before. But why have you never spoken to Gertrude the whole evening?" she asked.

Poor Harold! he had been longing for nothing better that night, but he only said,—

"There were so many who claimed her attention—she has been engaged all the time."

"Let me take you to her now; I can always find admittance to her circle, so please come with me," Milley said.

"Not now," he replied; "I will return to the drawing-room. I only wish she could be induced to sing to-night, as a great favour."

"I will ask her," Milley said, and was hastening off in search of her friend, when Harold gently caught her hand, and said, sadly,—

"Promise me you will keep my secret, little sister, before you go."

She looked up archly, as she said,—

"You know I never can. Let me go at once and give it to Walter; he will keep it much safer than I."

Harold could not refrain from laughing heartily, and as he did not answer, Milley told him she should take his silence for consent, and skipped away. She went first to Gertrude, and made her request in her own name; but she began to excuse

herself, so Milley presently whispered in her ear, "that it was Harold's request; would she grant it him, as a great favour?" The colour rose to her cheeks, as she turned to comply, and went back into the brilliantly lighted room. Milley soon followed her, with Walter, and they found Harold near the piano, so they seated themselves beside him.

Francis Riversdale cast angry glances at two or three young noblemen, who had followed Gertrude to the instrument, but it seemed wholly lost upon them, so he gave it up. She sang several of Harold's favourite songs, and her rich, melodious voice quite charmed and delighted all who listened, and when she rose from the piano she seated herself by Milley's side. Thus the friends were once more together, but only just as it was time to depart. One by one the guests disappeared, loading Milley with kindest wishes and birthday gifts.

"We are going to pay an early visit to the harvest fields to-morrow morning," Milley said; "promise me you will accompany us, dear Gertie, and we will call for you on our way."

Gertrude promised, as she bade her friends Good-night at the door.

Francis Riversdale came up at that moment; he

took her hand as he stood beside her, half expecting she would say something kind and complimentary, but she did not, and he passed out.

“When that young lady is mine,” he said to himself, “I will pay her for this. She shall suffer for every scornful word and every scornful look.”


---

## CHAPTER X.

## HARVEST AT AVONDALE.

WHEN the glorious sun cast its golden beams in at the chamber-windows of the parsonage the following morning, it roused both Milley and Harold from their slumbers. They remembered their appointment, and, hastily dressing themselves, were soon at the Villa, where they found Gertrude waiting for them. Both the young ladies took a small basket of provisions for some poor old people who were working in the fields at a short distance: Harold insisted upon carrying them, and they all three started off very happy.

"The flowers of the summer were fading away,  
But the valley is golden with grain wealth to-day ;  
Rich fruit hangs in clusters, and wreaths of gay hope,  
And the nut and the berry are ripe in the copse.  
. . . . . While the day is still new,  
And the pastures are moist with vanishing dew ;  
While the shadows stretch long from the dark forest trees,  
And the odours of fruit load the fresh morning breeze,  
Let us forth, where the orchard, and hop-yard, and field  
To the harvester's labour their ripe treasures yield ;  
We 'll wander awhile 'mid the light-hearted throng,  
And watch them while toiling, and list to their song.



See o'er the plain  
Waves the gold grain,  
Ripening and whitening in sunshine and breeze ;  
Heavily now,  
On many a bough,  
The ruddy-cheeked apples hang down from the trees.  
Out with the morn,  
Sweep down the corn ;  
Maids tend the sickle, and bind up the grain ;  
Gather the fruit  
Ere it fall from the shoot ;  
Fill every basket, and load every wain.  
Labour all day,  
While labour we may,  
Till evening shall come, when man labours no more ;  
The God that ordains  
The fruits and the grains,  
Shall bless cheerful labour 'in basket and store.'"

While the harvest lasted they were daily in the fields, and nothing afforded them greater pleasure than gathering the tired labourers together, under some cool, shady tree, where they had spread a cloth, covered with plain, homely fare, and cans of fragrant tea and coffee, which greatly refreshed them, as you might see by their smiling, grateful thanks. Then they would wander amongst the gleaners, picking up handfuls of corn, which they would sometimes add to the widow's store, sometimes to the poor old people (whose tottering limbs



told plainly that their labours were nearly at an end), or wherever they thought it most needful.

Harold was always ready to help in everything they undertook ; in fact, he had never before enjoyed life as he did then—never seemed to have been half so useful ; and many little improvements that they could not carry out, for want of funds, he had joyfully undertaken and accomplished.

At his expense, the little school had been repaired, and a small harmonium placed in it for their use ; also many other little additions came from the same generous source.

Thus August passed away, and September had begun—calm, beautiful September, with its soft, balmy days and dewy evenings ; with the glorious harvest-moon shedding its bright beams over all.

The harvest was now over, and the young people loved to take long, quiet rambles, sometimes in the woods, sometimes in the lanes and fields. Gertrude declared, that of all the months in the year she loved September best. She said,—

“ It makes me happy, though it sometimes makes me sad.”

“ Though September’s suns shine brightly,  
And September’s skies are blue—  
Though the autumn breezes lightly  
Stir the leaves of varied hue ;

Still a not unpleasant sadness  
Stealeth softly o'er our hearts,  
While we mourn the vanished gladness  
Of the summer which departs.

Though the autumn foliage glory  
In its green and gold array,  
Yet its splendours tell a story  
Of incipient decay.  
Let us listen to its teaching—  
For analogies profound,  
And throughout all nature reaching,  
Are within us and around.

Yes, the autumn foliage gaining  
Tints of beauty as it dies,  
Like the setting sun, which waning,  
Spreads new glory o'er the skies,  
Tells the Christian, that as nearer  
To the grave his footsteps tend,  
All his graces shall shine clearer,  
And beam brightest at his end."

Thus it happened one pleasant afternoon that the three friends strolled along the hill-side, above the parsonage, pausing now and then to admire the beautiful scene. Everything seemed calm and peaceful. The sun shone brightly over hill and dale, and a soft, hazy glow pervaded the distant woods. No sound broke the stillness, save the merry whistle or occasional shout of the plough-

man to his horses in the fields which had so lately been covered with the busy groups of gleaners, or now and then the sound of the sportsman's gun. The school-children were still enjoying their holidays, some in the woods and copses (especially the boys), "nutting," and others, with little baskets in their hands, were searching the hedge-rows for blackberries, that grew in abundance in the surrounding fields and hedges.

As the friends passed the happy little groups, they lifted their merry faces and dropped their humble curtsies, and Gertrude went up to speak to them. She held out her hand to a little dark-eyed favourite of hers, about six years old, with rosy cheeks and dark wavy hair, looking the very picture of health and spirits. Milley laughed heartily at the little stained fingers she held up, but Gertrude kissed her cherry lips, and took her little white cotton sun-bonnet, that was hanging on her arm, and placing it on her head, tied it under her chin, saying,—

"There, that is best for my little May."

The child smiled, as she ran off to join her companions, who had passed on, and again began her search for the rich, ripe fruit, to fill the little basket. Just to please her, Harold reached down several

branches quite loaded with blackberries with his walking-stick, and helped her to strip them, and it was difficult to say which of them most enjoyed the fun. They then left the little ones to themselves, and strolled on. Presently they came to a bank, nearly covered with pretty blue harebells. Milley was delighted, and stopped to gather some, but neither Harold nor Gertrude cared at that moment to do more than admire them, and passed on. The fact was, Harold was thinking with sorrow how fast the time was approaching for his departure, and somehow Gertrude seemed strangely silent too.

Harold drew a long, deep breath.

"How beautiful it all is ; and yet—I don't know why—it makes me feel sad."

Gertrude smiled, and sighed. The same vague restless yearning was troubling both their hearts.

"One feels so lonely on a day like this," he went on, in the same low tone. "One feels the need of close, warm ties to bind them to this lovely earth."

For a moment their eyes met.

"But you, Miss Heathcote, who have always moved in such an atmosphere of kind friendship and tender love, cannot really enter into the feelings of one so lonely as myself," he said, quickly, fixing his blue eyes with a look of inquiry on her face.

Her lustrous eyes drooped before his earnest gaze, as she said, sadly,—

“Indeed, you wrong me, Mr. Fairlie; no one is more ready to sympathize with the friendless than myself.”

“Pardon me, Miss Heathcote, if I spoke hastily; but I had just been thinking of the happy, happy days I have spent at the dear little parsonage yonder, and wandering over these beautiful hills with you and Miss Hammond, and the kind friends I have found here; and soon I must bid you all adieu, and return once more to my own home and quiet life, which I greatly fear will seem very lonely in comparison to what I have of late enjoyed.”

She raised her eyes to his face, and tried to smile, as she said,—

“But think, Mr. Fairlie, with what joy your dear old nurse will welcome you. I could almost fancy seeing her shed tears of joy over your return.”

Those kind words found their way to Harold's heart as nothing else could have done just then. He was rejoiced to find that she was sufficiently interested in his affairs to bestow a woman's sympathy on his kind old nurse, and enter into her feelings of joy at his return.

“That is quite true, Miss Heathcote; you have

drawn a very correct picture of my dear old friend. She assured me, in her last letter, that she was counting the days; probably, by this time she will be counting the hours."

There was silence for some moments, then he spoke again,—

"I wonder who will miss me when I am gone? I dare say I shall soon be forgotten, as though I had never been."

"Oh, Mr. Fairlie, I think it will be a long, long time before you are forgotten at Avondale."

"Miss Heathcote," he said, suddenly, "shall you ever think of me when I am far away?"

There was something in his tone that startled her, and looking up, she saw a bright flush on his handsome face, and his eyes fixed upon her, with a deep, searching look, as she answered,—

"I am sure I should be very ungrateful if I ever ceased to remember so kind a friend."

Gertrude never forgot his happy, beaming face at that moment. Those words, simple in themselves, had filled him with joy, coming as they did from the lips of that one dearer to him than all others.

Her eyes drooped before his tender gaze, and a deep blush suffused her beautiful face. That look

was far more eloquent than words, and told her plainly that she had won the love of Harold Fairlie ; and though no word had been spoken on the subject between them, Harold found courage to read the secret told by Gertrude's fair frank face, that flushed and grew crimson at his least word, though she strove to command her feelings, and speak in tones of unconcern. At that moment Milley's merry voice was heard singing behind ; she soon overtook them, with her little white hands filled with the pretty harebells. She chatted gaily to her friends as they walked home, which was a great relief to Harold and Gertrude, and as they bade the latter Good-bye at the Villa, they promised to call for her early on the following day. They were invited to join a picnic in the woods with some friends at a distance. They found Mr. Payne at the parsonage when they returned, and with very little pressing he consented to dine with them, and they spent a very pleasant evening.

The next morning, according to promise, Milley and Harold set off for the Villa, to call for Gertrude.

It was agreed upon that the three young people were to ride there, and Mr. Hammond would drive over later in the day, and bring Mr. Payne with

him. As they entered the gates, and the horses' hoofs sounded on the gravel, Gertrude appeared at the door, in her usual morning costume.

"Oh, Gertie! you not ready yet? I feared you would be waiting," Milley exclaimed.

"Do not be disappointed, darling, but I cannot join you to-day," Gertrude said, scarcely trusting herself to look at Harold. "I am so sorry, but we have just received a letter from uncle Heathcote, saying he will be at Avon Villa on business of importance this morning, and trusts to find us at home; so, of course, I cannot leave mamma, as I do not know what the object of his visit may be."

"What a pity! I am so sorry. It will quite spoil the party for me; but I know, dearest, if duty calls you at home, it will be useless to ask you to change your mind; so we will say Good-morning, and will call on our way back," Milley said.

"Good-morning, Milley dear; and I hope you will make yourself quite happy without me," Gertrude said

Harold lifted his hat, and bowed gracefully as he rode away. She returned his bow, and stood still upon the steps, and watched them till they were out of sight, then entered the house again, and seated



herself at the window, to await the coming of her uncle.

The two friends cantered on some time in silence. Presently they slackened their pace. It was a bright sunny morning; a cool fresh breeze was blowing, scattering the yellow leaves from the trees, and deepening the roses in Milley's cheeks.

"What a lovely morning, and sky of cloudless blue; the only cloud I have seen is on your face, Mr. Fairlie," she said, looking archly up at him. "But I can guess the cause, and deeply sympathize with you."

Harold coloured deeply, but she gave him no time to reply.

"I wonder what is bringing Mr. Heathcote to the Villa so suddenly; no bad news, I hope. He seldom goes from home, and with much persuasion he generally comes over once a year; so it must be something unusual that is bringing him now," she said, anxiously.

"He may have heard some tidings of the missing clerk," Harold said, hopefully.

"I think if that had been the case he would have said so," Milley replied,

Thus they rode on, talking over every probable and improbable reason for his sudden visit, until

they reached their destination, where for a time we will leave them, and return to the Villa.

We left Gertrude seated at the window, watching for her uncle's arrival.

---

## CHAPTER XI.

## SAD TIDINGS.

SOON after the departure of her friends, Gertrude heard the sound of wheels, and running to the door, she saw the handsome travelling carriage from Heathcote Manor enter the gates, and draw up in the front. Scarcely had the carriage stopped, before her uncle sprang out, and mounted the steps as fast as his advanced age of seventy would permit.

"Well, darling, how are you? and where is your dear mother?" he said, fondly kissing his niece, who welcomed him with a loving smile.

"Mamma is anxiously waiting for you in the drawing-room, and begged to be alone until you came. I will take you to her at once," she said, relieving him of his hat and stick, while with his large silk handkerchief he rubbed his forehead and smooth bald head. He found Mrs. Heathcote looking pale and anxious, and he was deeply grieved that he could not dispel her fears and reassure her.

Gertrude was about to leave the room, when her uncle gently caught her hand, saying,—

"Stay, darling, it is my wish." So she seated herself by her mother's side.

What passed during that interview we will not attempt to give in detail ; suffice it to say, that the bank in which Mrs. Heathcote's money was invested had suddenly closed, and her loss was very serious.

"My dear sister, I have been thinking it all over as I came along. The only thing for you to do is to sell this place. Prepare to leave it as soon as possible, and come to me. And let me beg of you not to give way to unnecessary grief," he said, kindly laying his hand on her arm ; "but try to bear up bravely ; and remember, as long as I have a home, my dear departed brother's wife and child shall share it. And now," he said, "I will undertake to manage everything for you, if you will please put me in possession of your papers, documents, &c."

"Dear Gertrude," Mrs. Heathcote said, leaning back in her chair, as if almost overcome, "you can take my keys, and accompany your uncle to the library, and find him all he requires."

"I fear it will be almost too much for your poor mamma, darling," Mr. Heathcote said, as they closed the door behind them. "It will be a sad blow to you both to leave your pretty home, I

know, but it must be. When your poor dear papa died so suddenly, I feared you would find yourselves in very reduced circumstances, but, thank God! when all was settled, things turned out better than we had dared to hope. I trust it may prove so again," he said, cheerfully.

"Now, my brave Gertrude," he said, kissing her brow tenderly, "go back to your poor mamma, and strive to cheer and comfort her."

So Gertrude returned to the drawing-room, and was surprised to find her mamma seated at her writing-table, hastily folding up a letter she had just written, and thrusting it into an envelope, rang her bell, and bade the servant who answered it dispatch the groom at once with it to Mr. Francis Riversdale. Gertrude did not appear to notice it, but conversed cheerfully with her mamma on any subject but "the hated one"; but Mrs. Heathcote cast uneasy glances at the pretty timepiece, and presently begged to be left alone, and Gertrude was thankful to escape, for she had determined not to see Francis if she could possibly avoid him.

Poor Mrs. Heathcote! who can describe her feelings at that moment, as she waited so anxiously for the appearance of her worthless favourite. Her only hope hung on him now.

Many pleasant thoughts flitted through the mind of Francis as he rode towards the Villa, soon to be his own, he said to himself, and with it one of the loveliest of girls. "Ah!" and he laughed a low mocking laugh, as he thought of the many ways in which, when she should be his wife, he could repay her coldness and scorn; "I will take some of the brightness and pride from that face," he said to himself.

But there was nothing of this to be discerned in the gay, graceful salutation with which he favoured Miss Heathcote, whom he passed in the hall, or in the deep respect with which he addressed her mother.

"Thank you, Francis, for coming so quickly," she said, as he entered the drawing-room, and then proceeded to inform him of her new, sad troubles. She gazed searchingly into his face as she finished, but saw only astonishment and wonder in every feature. She had thought, hoped, expected that he would protest that Gertrude should only leave the Villa as his wife. But the few sentences that passed his lips were cold and formal; not a syllable of consolation for the widow who would have given him her dearest treasure.

"Ah, well," he said, rising, as though to show

that the conversation had lasted long enough ;  
"poverty is a disagreeable thing."

"Gertrude is in the garden, I see," Mrs. Heathcote said; "would you like a few minutes' conversation with her?"

"No, no," he replied hurriedly; "Miss Heathcote must be in great trouble, and I am no good hand at offering consolation. I will say Good-morning now."

The front door closed with a bang as Francis left the house. Mrs. Heathcote hastened to the window, and saw him walking quickly across the lawn towards the stables, whither the groom had taken his horse. Presently she saw him again, galloping down the road towards St. Catherine's Court, and was soon out of sight. For a moment she stood rooted to the ground in dismay. She thought of his coldness and neglect in their last troubles, and all her former doubts and misgivings returned with redoubled force. To one of her proud, haughty spirit, it was a crushing blow. She could not bear the thought of being dependent on her husband's brother for a home for herself and child, kindly and tenderly though it was offered.

Soon after Francis left the house, the gong sounded for lunch, and when they were all three seated, Mr.

Heathcote begged his niece to take her mamma for a nice drive in the afternoon. At first she refused, but at length they prevailed. She ate but little, and seemed strangely silent. Just as they had finished, a groom from the Court brought her a letter, which he said was from his master. A smile of relief came over her face as she took it. "How wrong of me to doubt him," she said to herself. "He could not express what he felt; but I shall find it here. My darling will neither know poverty nor change, after all."

She quickly broke the seal, and Gertrude, watching her as she read the contents, saw her face grow white, even to the lips. Presently she raised her eyes to her daughter's face with a look of despair.

"My dear sister, what has happened?" exclaimed the Squire, in alarm.

She handed him the letter without a word. Gertrude twined her arms round her mother's neck, and said, gently,—

"I guess what it is, dear mamma. Never mind, we shall be together."

"Read that, darling," she said, pointing scornfully to the letter, which Mr. Heathcote had just finished reading.

She took it, and read lines that brought a proud



flush to her beautiful face. He said he was sorry for the change in Mrs. Heathcote's fortunes. There was little need to add that it broke the contract between them, as that contract had been made with the heiress of Avondale, a lady who, he understood, no longer existed. He regretted that "family circumstances" prevented him from renewing his offer to a lady who would be so entirely without fortune. Could he decide for himself he would do so, but others had decided for him. He concluded by saying he was not vain enough to hope that Miss Heathcote would feel any regret at the dissolution of their engagement, as she had taken every opportunity of showing her general distaste for his society.

"He has given you up, Gertrude," said the Squire, with eyes flashing anger.

"Yes, uncle," she replied, gaily.

"And he shall suffer for it," he said, striking his clenched hand violently on the table, making the glasses ring, and startling the little spaniel out of his sleep on the hearthrug.

Mrs. Heathcote sat pale and speechless.

"Dear uncle," Gertrude said, "you do not understand; he has rendered me the greatest service that lay in his power. I never loved him; I never even liked him. Little I care for the loss of our fortune,

since it has freed me from him. Did you not read his nature?—vain, cruel and tyrannical; loving money with a fierce greed; hiding all this under the mask of a handsome face and a studied smile.”

“Why did you tell me nothing of all this before?” asked the astonished Squire.

“It would have been no use,” she replied. “I loved you both too well to thwart you. I never intended to marry him, but trusted to the chapter of accidents for showing you Francis Riversdale as I judged, and not as you believed him to be. Now you see him in his true character.”

Again the Squire’s face flushed hotly.

“I tell you he shall suffer for it,” he said.

“He is not even worth honest dislike; so pray treat him with silent contempt, uncle,” Gertrude replied. She turned to her mother, and said,—“I am so thankful! I could not bear to vex you, dear mamma, but I disliked him so much. Now, the wretched engagement I never sanctioned is broken, and without any fault of mine. I have not been so happy for years, mamma.”

The Squire looked at his niece in utter amazement.

“I shall never understand young girls, I suppose,” he said, half wistfully. “Why, Gertrude, I feared your heart would be broken.”

Gertrude's sweet laugh sounded happier than it had done for a long time, and it cheered them both as nothing else could have done.

"Take my advice, uncle," Gertrude said ; "let him pass out of our lives as though he had never been."

"Will there be any answer, ma'am, to send back to the Court?" inquired the servant.

Squire Heathcote frowned darkly. He would have liked to send a message, but Gertrude's words returned to him—"silent contempt." He glanced at Mrs. Heathcote to answer.

"No," she said calmly, "there is no reply."

"He told me poverty was a disagreeable thing," Mrs. Heathcote said, rising to prepare for her drive ; "but there are some things far more disagreeable than poverty even," she said, bitterly.

Francis Riversdale, anxiously awaiting his messenger's return, was disappointed at receiving no answer. The groom, thinking to please his young master, told him he had seen Miss Heathcote, who was going out for a drive with her mamma. She looked remarkably well, but had sent no message. He was deeply mortified. He thought of the beautiful girl he had lost, and even the cold, proud heart of Francis Riversdale felt some pang of regret.

Miss Hammond told her papa that she and Mr.

Fairlie intended leaving the party early enough to go back by the Villa, to inquire after their friends. He readily agreed to their plan, as he himself felt anxious about them. Mrs. Heathcote and her daughter had not returned from their drive when Milley and Harold reached the Villa. They rode round into the stable-yard, and leaving their horses in charge of the groom, they entered the house. The servant told them that Mrs. Heathcote was expected every moment now, and Mr. Heathcote was engaged in the library; so they settled themselves at the drawing-room window, to await their coming.

"What a pleasant window!" exclaimed Harold; "and such a magnificent view of Bath, too."

"It is charming," Milley replied. "I often remember standing at this window, when quite a little girl, and feeling quite proud when I could distinguish the churches in the distance, pointing them out by their different spires, and calling them by name. One day, I remember, poor Mr. Heathcote took Gertie and me with him to Clifton. It was about this time of year, and we came through Bath on our way home. By the time we reached Bath it was getting dusk, and before we left it was quite dark. It was the first time we had seen it lighted up at

night. I could almost fancy I see it now as it looked then, with its bright lamps glittering like a shower of stars that had fallen from the sky ; and as we looked above our heads, there they were, too, shining round the villas, and round crescent above crescent, and terrace above terrace. It was a pretty sight ; it seemed like fairyland to our excited imagination. We were almost wild with delight. Those were such happy days, Mr. Fairlie ; and Gertie has always seemed as if she was my own dear sister."

Just at that moment the door opened, and Mr. Heathcote entered.

" Ah, my little friend, is it you ?" he exclaimed joyfully, as he held out his hand to Milley.

" And this, then, is the young gentleman I have heard of from several quarters, I suppose," he said, shaking hands cordially with Harold.

" Hearing the sound of voices, and thinking Mrs. Heathcote and Gertrude had returned, I came in," he went on, taking a seat near them.

" Your sudden visit has quite overwhelmed us all with astonishment," Milley began ; " I hope nothing has happened, Mr. Heathcote."

In his usual straightforward manner, he told them everything that had transpired.

Milley was unable to control her feelings at the thought of losing her friend, and bursting into a passionate fit of weeping, left the room.

"Can I do nothing to help them, Mr. Heathcote?" Harold said. He was not ashamed of the tears that shone in his eyes as he spoke. "I have money, sir; pray command what they may require for immediate use, until something more can be done."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness and generosity, young gentleman," replied the Squire, casting an admiring glance at the handsome form before him; "but you do not understand, Mrs. Heathcote as I do. She has a proud, independent spirit, that cannot bear to feel under an obligation to any one, even her nearest friend. For the present they will come to me, and if they will not remain I must find them some little inexpensive place; but I shall insist upon her accepting a comfortable income as long as she lives. This place must be sold as soon as possible. The difficult thing is, to find a purchaser at this season of the year."

A sudden thought struck Harold that caused his heart to beat high with joy, but he only said,—

"As a great favour, may I ask if you will allow me to come and see you to-morrow, and perhaps I

may render some assistance? If I can, I shall feel only too happy to do so."

"Most certainly, with great pleasure, Mr. Fairlie," replied the Squire.

Just at that moment Milley came rushing into the room in a great fright, exclaiming,—

"Oh! do come, both of you; I am sure I can hear the sound of Gertrude's ponies, coming at a rapid rate down the road. Something must be wrong. She never drives like that. Oh dear! what can it be?" and she clasped her hands in terror.

The gates were standing open, and they had no sooner crossed the hall than the chaise came dashing through them, and the poor tired ponies drew up at the door, white with foam, and panting, as it were, for breath. Mrs. Heathcote lay back on the cushions, pale as death, with closed eyes. They saw at a glance what had happened; she had fainted.

In a moment Harold sprang into the chaise, and, with Gertrude's assistance, lifted her in his strong, manly arms, and carried her into the house (Gertrude walking by her side, looking almost as pale as her unconscious mother), and placed her tenderly on a sofa. Milley hastened to call assistance, and fetch water and restoratives.

"The doctor—some one must be despatched for him immediately," Gertrude said, looking at her uncle and Harold.

She had no sooner said the word than Harold offered his services.

"I will go, Miss Heathcote ; my horse is here, ready to mount. Every moment is precious ; I shall start at once."

She knew the truth of his words, and looked the thanks that her lips could not utter ; but that look was sufficient to make him feel that he would gladly travel to the end of the world for her sweet sake. He thought also of the pale, suffering mother over whom she was bending, and was soon dashing along the road at full speed.

When Gertrude and her mother left home that afternoon, Mrs. Heathcote expressed a wish to visit a poor family at some distance ; and after they left the cottage, they walked a little way down a green lane to gather some ferns and mosses, of which she was extremely fond. They then returned to the chaise, which they had left in charge of a labourer. They both got in, and Gertrude suddenly noticed that her mother looked pale as death, even to her lips.

"What is the matter, dear mamma ; you are ill.



Let me drive you back to the cottage," Gertrude said, in alarm.

"Take me home, dearest," she whispered faintly, lying back on the cushions.

Poor Gertrude drove back as fast as possible, and as she came in sight of home her mother closed her eyes, and was insensible. What followed is already known. Mrs. Heathcote lay pale and still upon the sofa, surrounded by her anxious friends, who were vainly bathing her temples and chafing her cold hands. Presently she opened her eyes, and revived a little, and between them they carried her to her own room; but before the doctor came she had fainted again.

"I shall not leave yet," Milley said to Harold, when he returned; and dear papa will be so anxious about us. Do please go home, and tell him all about it. Some one can come to fetch me presently.

Harold went back to the parsonage, taking Milley's horse with him, and "some one" did go to fetch her later in the evening, with the carriage.

---

## CHAPTER XII.

## OLD ANDREW'S WISH.

EACH day found Milley and Harold at the Villa, to inquire after the invalid. Harold and Mr. Heathcote were often together for hours in the quiet library. Harold was growing rapidly in the Squire's favour. He greatly admired his noble generosity, also his pleasant, agreeable, and gentlemanly manners.

"Just the one I should feel proud to own as my nephew," the Squire said to himself one day, after he had left.

Mrs. Heathcote's illness proved to be a very serious one ; for some time she lay almost between life and death. Gertrude could scarcely be prevailed upon to leave her bedside, and Milley was often there too. At length there came a day when the doctor pronounced her out of danger, and slowly, very slowly, she came as it were back to life. Harold had not once seen Gertrude since her mother's illness, and it seemed to him almost an age. One evening he returned to the parsonage, looking unusually downcast. In a few days he was

going to bid them all adieu, and return to the Château; but he felt he must see Gertrude once more, and speak to her before he left.

"Oh, that I could tell her how dear she is to me," he said to himself; "oh, that I could claim her as my bride, to grace my beautiful home—to bless me with her priceless love! I ask no richer dower. How gladly would I lavish upon her my wealth, my love, my all. My sole thought should be to make her happy. Her dear mother, too, should share our home, and we would strive to cheer and comfort her declining days."

He sat there for some time in a deep reverie. He was in the library alone with Mr. Hammond, who appeared to be engaged in reading the day's paper. Presently Harold chanced to look up, and saw the mild eyes of the aged pastor fixed upon him with a tender, questioning gaze. He instantly laid down his paper, and taking off his spectacles, drew his seat nearer, and said kindly, as a father might have done,—

"My son, you are unhappy; something troubles you, I know; cannot you confide in me? Let me help or advise you, if I can."

That gentle voice, those kind, pleading tones, seemed to quite overcome him at first. He buried

his face in his hands, and for some few moments he was unable to speak.

"I have noticed you looking downcast and depressed of late ; but my dear young friend, I think I have partly guessed the cause," the pastor said, gently.

Thus encouraged, Harold seemed greatly relieved, and looked up, saying,—

"Thank you, Mr. Hammond, for your kind sympathy. I am sure you must have thought me a most unsociable being of late, but I trust to your generosity to pardon any seeming indifference I may have unintentionally shown towards you."

Then, unreservedly, he opened his heart to his kind old friend, and told him all his hopes and fears.

"She is the first woman I have ever loved, Mr. Hammond," he said ; "and no other will I make my bride—no other shall win my love. May Heaven bless her, my pure, beautiful angel !"

The old pastor smiled at the earnestness of his young friend, but, nevertheless, rejoiced at it in his heart.

"I feel deeply interested in her welfare. Gertrude Heathcote is almost as dear to me as my own child. I am thankful that she is free from that unhappy engagement ; it has been her secret trouble for a

long time, although she has borne it in silence. It was only now and then she would speak to me of it, when we were quite alone. She told me the last time it was mentioned, with tears in her eyes, that she trusted in Providence that some day she should be released. Once I ventured to remonstrate with her mother against disregarding her child's inclinations; but she told me, in a very haughty, decided manner, to consider the affair as settled, and begged me never to mention the subject in her presence again. This was unknown to Gertrude, as I knew she would be unwilling to sanction it. Poor child! she kept her sorrow locked within her own breast; to all appearance she was cheerful and happy, but those who knew her as I did knew it was not so. But, thank God! she is free again now."

Harold thought he would like to punish the villain who had insulted misfortune, but was thankful that Gertrude would suffer no more persecution on his account. Mr. Hammond talked to him hopefully, and Harold felt greatly comforted and cheered, but he said,—

"A short time ago, Mr. Hammond, I had hoped that Miss Heathcote was not totally indifferent towards me, but now she seems to shun me altogether—I cannot even see her now."

"I think I understand her there, too," he replied ; "she was an heiress then (though not so rich as she would have been if all had been well), but now they are poor, and whatever might have been her feelings towards you then, she will, doubtless, shrink from the society of those in a sphere so far above hers now, especially as Francis Riversdale scorned her for her poverty. But take courage, my son, and I heartily wish you good success, and hope that in time all may be well."

Each day found Mrs. Heathcote gradually gaining strength. The Squire had gone back to the Manor, to prepare for his sister's removal and see that everything was provided for her comfort, promising to return for her as soon as she could bear the journey. Poor Gertrude felt very sad at the thought of leaving her dear home, still for one reason she felt glad. Mr. Fairlie would be no longer at Avondale. It was not till then she knew how entirely he had won her young heart's first love.

"I dare not trust myself to see him again," she said to herself ; "in a new home and new scenes I must strive to forget him."

Every day found Milley and Harold at the Villa, but Milley could not persuade her friend to come

down to speak to him, so she often remained behind, and Harold walked home alone.

Milley would talk of his approaching departure, with tears in her eyes, saying,—

“I cannot bear the thought of losing you, Gertie ; but to part from both is dreadful.”

She was loud in Harold’s praises, and often brought the bright colour to Gertrude’s lovely face, but she noticed that she generally contrived to turn the conversation. One day Milley broke out in her old impetuous manner, saying,—

“Gertie, Gertie, why don’t you come down and speak to Mr. Fairlie? He must think it very strange and unkind of you. You have not one excuse left ; your mamma is quietly sleeping, and does not need you now, so do come down with me. It is so unlike you, Gertrude.”

They were seated together in Gertrude’s own room, and Milley saw her friend turn pale, while a sad, pained look overspread her fair face, while tears gathered in her dark eyes, as she replied,—

“Ah, Milley darling, you do not understand. I am only a poor girl now, and must no longer associate with persons so much above my sphere.”

“Oh, Gertie,” Milley exclaimed, bursting into tears, and throwing her arms round her friend’s



neck, "pray never say that again; Mr. Fairlie is so good, so noble-minded; you wrong him much, Gertie—indeed you do. I am sure he thinks more of you than ever."

For some moments their tears mingled; they seemed to have changed places, for Milley performed the office of comforter to the weeping Gertrude.

That same evening, towards sunset, Harold set out alone, to bid some of the poor old villagers Good-bye, who lived at some little distance from the parsonage. It was a glorious evening.

"The weary sun hath made a golden set,  
And by the bright track of his fiery car,  
Gives token of a goodly day to-morrow."

The labourers were leaving the fields, and gladly seeking their cottage homes, to rest after the day's toil.

"Light thickens, and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood."

Harold set off to the cottage of a poor old man whom he had often visited, and helped, too, in many ways. He paused at the garden-gate, hearing a female voice within, and as the old man dwelt alone, he thought it might be a friend or relation, and not



wishing to intrude, was about to turn away, thinking to come again another evening, but the sound of that voice suddenly arrested him ; his beating heart told him it was no other than Gertrude Heathcote. The door opened and she came out, turning again on the step to speak to the white-haired old man, who, leaning on his stick, was following her with tottering steps.

"Good-bye, Andrew," she said, holding out her hand cordially. "I hope to see you again before very long. I shall hear of you sometimes from Miss Hammond. Do not come out into the damp air with your cough—Good-bye once more, Andrew."

The poor old man's voice sounded very unsteady, as he replied,—

"Good-bye, Miss Heathcote, and may Heaven bless you wherever you go, and bring you back to us again soon !"

Gertrude walked hastily down the little garden-path, and suddenly caught sight of Harold, who stood holding open the gate for her to pass. She was thankful to the deepening twilight that hid the crimson blush that dyed her cheek. Harold was rejoiced at seeing her again, and was at no loss to express the pleasure he felt. Gertrude could scarcely command her voice to answer his kind inquiries,

and, against the pleadings of her own heart, refused his offer to accompany her home.

She should call at several cottages on her way, she said, and preferred going alone, to take leave of the poor old people whom she had known from childhood.

"I suppose you are aware that I leave here in a day or two, Miss Heathcote?" Harold said, approaching her, and speaking in a low tone.

"Yes," she replied, with eyes downcast. "Milley told me that you were thinking of returning home soon."

"In memory of past friendship, let me beg one favour of you before you go, Miss Heathcote?" Harold asked, tenderly.

Gertrude did not answer, and he went on,—

"If you will not allow me to accompany you home, promise that you will grant me one interview before I leave. Let me not fare worse than these poor cottagers, on whom you are bestowing a kindly leave-taking. To-morrow morning I will come to the Villa; may I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you, Miss Heathcote?" he asked, pleadingly.

Poor Gertrude felt it impossible to refuse his kind request, and the appealing gaze of his blue eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Fairlie, if you wish it," she replied; and not trusting herself to say more, she held out her hand to bid Good-night.


"A thousand thanks, Miss Heathcote," he said, seizing her extended hand; "till then, farewell."

He stood watching her retreating form for a few moments, as she hastened homeward, and then entered the cottage, where he found poor old Andrew gazing after her from his window, and as she had just passed out of sight, he turned to his visitor, saying,—

"She is an angel, sir, if there ever was one visited this wicked world."

"You are speaking of Miss Heathcote, I suppose," Harold said.

"To be sure I be, sir," he replied. "I feel well nigh heart-broken to see the meek, patient way she bears everything, without a murmur. Only to think, in the midst of all her troubles, she has not forgotten the poor lonely old man who used to gather bunches of lilies and roses from this very garden to please her, when she was only just old enough to say my name. Her poor father used to be not a little proud to bring her round to see us old folks, I can tell you, sir; and well he might, for she was just as lovely as any little fairy. She was



a beautiful child, sir, and always so generous, too; and she is grown up into a beautiful lady now, just as I thought she would—and now to think she is leaving us. Ah, sir, I am losing my best friend.”

He sank into his old arm-chair, and hastily dashed away a tear that was quietly stealing down his furrowed cheeks. Harold took a seat near him, and strove to cheer and comfort him, and for some time they conversed together, until, by degrees, the poor old man became more hopeful and cheerful.

“See,” he said to Harold, pointing to a parcel on the table, which had been opened, “what a nice present Miss Heathcote has brought me; what a comfort they will be when the cold weather sets in.”

Nice warm stockings that Gertrude had knitted, and flannel waistcoats that she herself had made, and a small purse containing a bright sovereign, saved from her own pocket-money, lay spread out before them.

“How very kind and thoughtful of her, Andrew,” Harold replied, gazing with admiration at the gift.


“Ah, sir, you may well say kind and thoughtful, for that she always is.”

Presently Harold rose to take his leave.

“One more word, sir, if you please, before you go.”

"Certainly, Andrew ; what is it ?" asked Harold.

"Pardon an old man for speaking so bold to a gentleman, sir," he said ; " but I have heard that Mr. Riversdale, of the Court, has given up Miss Heathcote now she has lost her fortune, and he is gone abroad, some say for change of air, some say for 'change of heiresses.' People will talk about something, you know, sir ; and when some of my old neighbours drop in of an evening to have a chat, I generally hear a little what is going on. As I was a saying, sir, people will talk, and as Miss Graham is a rich heiress now, and just gone on the Continent, that has given them something to talk about, for they say he is following her. He will get his reward some day, though I am heartily glad he has left Miss Heathcote free to make a better choice, for he was never worthy to walk in her shadow. Well, now, sir, to make my story complete, I must tell you the rest. My neighbours were a saying last night, how they wished that you would buy Avon Villa—a wish that I heartily seconded, you may be sure, sir ; for then, we all said, what a pretty match might be made between you and Miss Heathcote, and we should not lose her after all. I am sure, sir, the whole parish would rise up to give you its blessing."



"Thanks for your kind wishes, Andrew," Harold replied ; " but suppose the lady herself should not be willing," he said.

" May I take the liberty of repeating the old proverb, sir ? " said Andrew ; " Faint heart never won fair lady."

Harold could not help smiling at the old man's earnestness, and he said,—

" But did you not know that the Villa is already sold, Andrew ? "

" I never heard that, sir," he replied, shaking his head ; " but I shall not give up all hopes yet, sir," he added, cheerfully. " I trust I may yet live to see ' the Rose of Avondale ' your bride."

Harold thanked him again for his kind wishes, and placed two sovereigns in his hand, as he bade him Good-bye, hoping to see him again some time the following year.

" Good-bye, sir, good-bye ; and right sorry I am to say the word," the old man said, fervently ; " and may Heaven bless you, sir, for your kindness, and make you happy, both in this world and the world to come ! "

Harold walked back toward the parsonage with a heart overflowing with joy. He thought of the wishes of poor old Andrew, also the coming morrow,

in which he had determined to learn his fate. It was certainly the bright side of the picture he was looking at that night ; yes, he thought, bright as the crimson streaks in the west, where the sun had gone down, and he would not allow himself to think that the morrow's sun might show him the darker one. No, he thought, hope should be his guiding star, and he would leave all trustingly in the hands of Providence. Everything was calm and still as he entered the parsonage garden.

" The bat hath flown  
His cloistered flight ;  
The shardborne beetle, with its drowsy hums,  
Hath rung night's yawning peal."

It is almost needless to add, that Harold's sleep (the little he had that night) was strangely disturbed by dreams ; therefore, he arose early the next morning, and throwing open his window, looked out upon the dewy lawn.

---

## CHAPTER XIII.

## AN EVENTFUL MORNING.

“What envious streaks

Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east ;  
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.”

THE sun was rising in all its glory, chasing away the fog and vapours of night. Harold hastily dressed himself, and went out to enjoy the fresh morning air. He walked towards the foot of the hill that led to the Villa, past a farm-house, where the maids were already bringing in their foaming pails of sweet milk upon their heads.

At the pond he was saluted by a stately flock of geese standing upon its margin, stretching their snowy wings, and pluming themselves in the sunshine, but ceased at his approach, hissing and stretching out their necks at him as he passed. The next objects that took his attention were two little boys, with baskets, gathering the elderberries that hung in ripe clusters by the road-side. He helped them until they had filled their baskets, reaching down the best bunches with his walking-stick, to



the great delight of the poor boys, who were then enabled to return home to their breakfast much sooner than they otherwise could have done.

The bell was ringing for prayers as Harold returned to the parsonage; so he took his accustomed place in the library without a word. When prayers were over, and they walked towards the dining-room, Harold greeted his friends in a more cheerful manner than he had done of late.

"I have had such a delightful walk," he said to Milley, as they seated themselves at the breakfast-table.

"I need not ask if you have enjoyed it," she replied gaily; "for you look as fresh as the morning. Surely Phoebus has left some of his bright reflection on your face, Mr. Fairlie," she said, glancing up archly.

After breakfast he busied himself with collecting his music and paintings, selecting a few that Milley and Gertrude had most admired, to leave with them, as a slight remembrance of past happy days. Milley was delighted, especially as one of hers was a sketch of Harold's home, the pretty Château de Beauville.

"I give you that, to remind you of your promise,



little sister," he said smiling; "remember where you have promised to spend your honeymoon. Miss Heathcote was present at the time, so there can be no denial."

"Yes, yes, I remember, Mr. Fairlie," Milley said, laughing and blushing. "But speaking of Miss Heathcote, reminds me that I promised to be with her early to-day; so we must hasten," she said.

She was too much engrossed in her own thoughts to notice how Harold's face grew red and pale by turns, and his hands trembled with nervous anxiety, as he laid aside the paintings for Gertrude, carefully folded in paper.

Milley assisted him to gather up the rest of his scattered treasures, and carried them away to his room, ready for "the hateful packing," as she called it. She ran upstairs for her hat and cloak, and when she came down Harold was waiting for her at the door.

They walked on for some time in silence; but silence formed no part of Milley's warm, impulsive nature, and presently she began to speak of the subject that lay nearest both their hearts—the dread subject of "separation."


"Ere a few weeks have passed, only think how

we shall be divided," she said, sadly, with tears fast gathering in her bright eyes. "You, Mr. Fairlie, will be back in your pretty home, and Gertrude, my poor dear Gertrude, will be gone to Heathcote Manor; and I shall be left alone. Oh, I cannot bear the thought of parting from her, my more than sister!"

"Miss Hammond, Milley," Harold said gently, "left alone, did you say? Mine, I think, will be the loneliest lot," he added, sadly.

"Of course, I shall have dear papa and Walter," she replied, looking up through her tears, and guessing his meaning. "But no one can fill the place of my dear, dear Gertrude. It is wrong and selfish of me, I know, but I cannot help it. I shall perhaps become more reconciled to it in time." Here her tears flowed fast, and she turned away her face to hide them. Harold spoke hopefully of the future, and strove kindly to comfort and console her; and by the time they reached the Villa, had so far succeeded as to see her smiling through her tears, like the sun between the showers on an April day.

As they entered the Villa, her first inquiry was for Gertrude, whom the servant informed her had gone out some few minutes before, and was probably in the garden, or somewhere not far distant. Mrs.



Heathcote had risen, Milley was told, but was now sleeping on the sofa in her boudoir.

Milley and Harold entered as usual the familiar drawing-room, and as soon as the servant had closed the door behind them, Milley said, significantly,—

“Suppose you go in search of Gertrude, Mr. Fairlie, while I remain quietly here until you return.”

He glanced at her with a flushed face and sunny smile, and without a word bowed and left the room.

He was soon pacing up and down the pretty garden paths, casting anxious glances everywhere for the object of his thoughts. It was a soft, still, October day. The leaves were quietly fluttering down, one by one. The gossamers in the garden, stretching from shrub to shrub, were strung with tiny beads of dew, and resembled nets of woven pearls. No bird sang; everything was calm and still. The weather had been unusually mild, and the garden was still gay with flowers; even, here and there, might be seen a lovely rose,—

“And brighter bloom the flowers that still remain,  
As if they knew they ne’er should bloom again.”

At the lower end of the garden he saw Gertrude

standing, half hidden by thick laurels, and leaning on the iron railings that separated the bottom of the garden from the adjoining meadow. She stood intently watching a busy scene in an orchard, away down in the valley. The labourers were gathering the rich, ripe fruit, and filling the waggons, ready to take them away to the mills to be ground down into clear, sparkling cider.

She did not see Harold, or hear him, until he stepped off the smooth green sward, and his footsteps sounded on the hard, crisp gravel.

In another moment he was at her side. He saluted her in his natural, easy, graceful manner, and though she strove to maintain her self-command, he noticed that at his approach her face grew crimson, but soon faded, leaving it paler than before. After the first greeting was over, they were both silent. Poor Harold's heart seemed almost too full for words. It was Gertrude who spoke.

"I suppose you have come to say Good-bye to myself and mamma, Mr. Fairlie; when do you leave?" she asked, trying to look unconcerned.

"To-morrow morning, Miss Heathcote," he replied, in a low tone.

"So soon as that!" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"So soon, I am sorry to say," he answered.

She did not look up, but he saw the colour rise to her face again, as she still gazed in the direction of the orchard.

"I have much to say to you before I leave, Miss Heathcote, and I feel the time is short; so I trust you will pardon my seeming abruptness. This little packet contains a few of my paintings that you have most admired; may I hope you will accept them, in remembrance of the happy past?"

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Fairlie," she said, glancing up with a pleased look.

"Do you ever remember to have seen any one who in the least resembled this portrait, Miss Heathcote?" Harold asked, as he drew a case from his pocket, opened it, and placed it in her hand.

She gazed at it in silence for a few moments, while Harold's eyes were fixed with a deep scrutinizing gaze upon her face.

"Impossible!" she exclaimed; "and yet I feel almost sure that it is,—yes, it must be, our dear, kind friend whom we met at Nice. Oh, where did you obtain this—why did you never show me this before?"

"For several reasons, Miss Heathcote, which I will presently explain, since you have recognized your old friend. Yes," he said, taking the portrait from her again, and gazing at it tenderly, "it was

these hands that placed that pretty, costly ring upon your finger. It was these lips that pressed your forehead, and called you 'daughter.' I knew the story of that ring before I ever thought to see the owner of it."

"Who could have told you this—was it our dear friend himself?" she asked, quickly.

"I heard it from Mr. Fairlie's own lips, Miss Heathcote," Harold answered. "You look astonished, as well you may; but you will be still more so, when I tell you that it is no other than Harold Fairlie, the son of your old friend, who now stands before you."

At first Gertrude stood pale and speechless with amazement, as if she almost doubted the evidence of her senses. Presently she spoke, but her sweet voice trembled.

"Where is he now, Mr. Fairlie? I almost fear to ask, is he still living?"

Harold hastily opened the packet, and drew from thence a sketch of the beautiful marble tomb.

"His body lies here," he said, pointing to his name, plainly visible on the white slab; "but his happy spirit is, I trust, in Heaven," he added reverently, looking upward, his eyes filled with tears.

Gertrude did not answer, but, taking the portrait



again, gazed at it long and tenderly, with streaming eyes. The sight of that kind face recalled the past, with all its painful associations, so vividly to her mind, that for a few moments she felt almost overcome, but striving to regain her composure, said gently,—

“This is not the sketch I have seen before, Mr. Fairlie.” She took it again, to examine it more closely. “That bore one name only—‘Rosine,’ the name of your departed mother.” She looked up in Harold’s face for answer.

“True, Miss Heathcote ; that one was sketched before my dear father’s death, and I have this morning given it to Miss Hammond. This one was the last thing I did before leaving home, little thinking it would come into the possession of the very one of whom my dear father had so often spoken in terms of affection, even on his dying bed.”

He then opened a miniature, and held it for her inspection, watching her the while. She looked up and smiled, as she said,—

“Really, Mr. Fairlie, this face certainly resembles my own—but far more beautiful,” she added, quickly. “May I ask who is the fair original?”

“My angel mother,” Harold answered, proudly.



"You think that face resembles your own ; so do I. So thought my dear, dear father, when he first beheld you walking in the garden at Nice,—so much so, that he said it seemed as if my dear mother stood before him, in her early, beautiful girlhood."


"It was I, then, who unknowingly caused his sudden illness," she exclaimed, clasping her hands. "Oh, why did he never tell me !"

"It was a subject so painful to him, that he seldom spoke of it to his oldest friend. He ever carried that miniature in his bosom, and there it was found when he died."

They were silent for a few moments ; then Harold spoke again, in a low, tender voice,—

"Miss Heathcote, we are always taught to regard the wishes of the dead as sacred, and endeavour, as far as lies in our power, to fulfil them. My father's dearest earthly wish was to call you daughter, though it seemed then perfectly hopeless in every respect, and it can only have been the hand of Providence that has guided me to you now. Gertrude, my love, be mine."

She did not answer, and her eyes were fixed upon the ground ; but at least there was no repulsion in her attitude, and the expression of her troubled face, if grave, was tender ; therefore, standing in the



peaceful garden, with the pleasant, soft October sunbeams falling around them, he told the story of his love, and pleaded for an answer.

"Gertrude, my first, my only love, pause ere you reply," he exclaimed passionately. "I have dared to raise the cup of happiness to my lips; do not cast it from me for ever."

Still she did not speak, but stood pale and still.

"If you do not, cannot care for me——" And his voice plainly told what despair such a sentence would be.

"I do care for you," she murmured, "for your own sake, Mr. Fairlie, as well as your dear father's. I shall ever esteem you as a kind, true friend; but you must remember I am only a poor girl now," she said, lifting her head proudly, "while you are wealthy, and might win the noblest lady in the land as your bride."

He gazed at her, standing pale but beautiful before him, with his whole soul in his eyes. At that moment she seemed a thousand times dearer to him than before.

"My darling, have I not riches enough for us both? All that I have is yours. Only bless me with your precious love, and I shall be happy. Pardon me if I am too hasty, but give me some

grounds for hope, and God knows how willingly I would wait, years of my life, so that I might call you mine in the end."

He tenderly took her hand, and as she raised her beautiful face to his, he read there all her lips would fain have uttered. Her dark lustrous eyes shone with such deep, undying affection, that filled Harold's soul with a joy before unknown, as he folded her with rapture to his breast, and kissed again and again that marble brow, that his dear father's lips before had pressed, and in the hearts of both was established the peace of a sure and steadfast love, as they returned to the house together. At the drawing-room door they were met by Milley, who saw at a glance how matters stood between her friends.

Harold's handsome face was radiant with smiles, and Gertrude walked by his side, with flushed cheeks and eyes wet with happy tears. Milley threw her arms round her neck, and kissing her fondly, exclaimed,—

"Dear Gertie, I am so glad—so happy."

"I must hasten to mamma, now, darling," Gertrude said, as she turned to leave the room, and Milley quickly followed her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## SEPARATION.

MRS. HEATHCOTE was awake when the two girls entered her room, and was evidently studying the contents of an open letter she held.

"Well, darling," she said, addressing herself to Milley, "has your friend, Mr. Fairlie, accompanied you to-day?"

"Yes, Mrs. Heathcote," Milley answered; "he is now waiting in the drawing-room."

"I have a message for him from your Uncle Heathcote," she said, looking at Gertrude; "I wonder if he would come and speak to me for a few moments."

"That I am sure he would; shall I run and fetch him at once?" Milley asked, quickly.

Mrs. Heathcote no sooner bowed her head in assent than Milley disappeared, and in a few minutes Harold was standing by the side of her sofa. She still looked very weak and ill, and unable to converse much with them. The interview was brief, but sufficient to show that her serious illness

had softened and subdued her as nothing else had done. Her child now seemed her only joy and consolation, except her Bible, which she had now chosen as a guide unto her feet and a lamp unto her path. Francis Riversdale's name she never mentioned now. To her sorrow, she found she had mistaken tinsel for gold, and the bitter disappointment she felt had helped to crush her haughty pride and worldly spirit, and left her more humble and resigned. She was now ready to exclaim with the poet,—

“ We, ignorant of ourselves,  
Beg often our own harms, which the wise powers  
Deny us for our good ; so find we profit,  
By losing of our prayers.”

The good old Squire, with whom Harold was a particular favourite, had written to beg that he would join their Christmas gathering at Heathcote Manor ; especially as Mr. Hammond and Milley were to be there, also Mr. Payne. He would feel proud and happy to welcome him at such a festive season, particularly as he had never seen an old-fashioned English Christmas dinner, “ one of the olden times.”

It needed little persuasion to make him accept the invitation, to Milley's great joy, who would have

danced and clapped her hands with delight, had it been elsewhere than in the presence of an invalid. And judging from her happy blushing face, Gertrude, in her own gentle manner, was equally delighted with the arrangement. They all agreed to dine together at the Villa that night, just to please Mrs. Heathcote ; "It would be the last time," she said. So Milley promised to bring her papa, and Walter, if he reached the parsonage in time ; if not, he would follow. They then took leave of their friends, and hurried home to complete the preparations for Harold's journey on the morrow, in which he found Milley's help invaluable ; and in return, she begged that they might have just one more ride together, if only for an hour, and Harold felt he could not refuse "his little sister's request," as he still continued to call her. The afternoon was far advanced ere they set out in their favourite direction over the Downs, Milley looking the picture of health and happiness as she chatted gaily to Harold, and cantered at his side, now and then patting the neck of her beautiful favourite, and speaking to it in tones of affection. It was only occasionally that a shade of sadness passed over her face, and dimmed its brightness, as she thought of the two dear friends she was about to lose. But it soon passed away, as a cloud from

the summer sky, leaving it bright and clear again. They returned to the parsonage only just in time to dress for dinner. Mrs. Heathcote presided at the table for the first time since her illness, and when they retired to the drawing-room she lay reclined upon a sofa, with such a meek, patient look of resignation in her pale face, that those who had known her in former years marvelled greatly to see the change, but none more so than Mr. Hammond, who, seated by her side, was surprised to find in her an interested listener, as he spoke with all his usual warmth and tenderness of one or two cases of distress that had lately come under his notice.

The young people formed a group of themselves, talking in low, earnest tones. Now and then might be heard Milley's silvery laugh, or Gertrude's sweet voice, mingling with Harold and Walter's manly tones, until Mrs. Heathcote presently asked,—

“Gertrude, darling, why is there no music to-night?”

“We feared it would be too much for you, mamma, dear,” Gertrude replied.

“Oh no, darling; I am so much better that I am almost strong again,” she answered. The fact was, she had ceased to dwell so much upon herself and her own trials, and thought more of others.

Gertrude and Milley, who sang beautifully together, rose and went to the piano, and at Harold's request sang once more one of his favourite duets. Others followed, in which Harold and Walter joined; and thus passed the happy evening. At an early hour they took their leave, on account of Mrs. Heathcote. She shook hands kindly with Harold, telling him she should look forward with much pleasure to meet him again at Christmas.

Suddenly Milley remembered there were some books belonging to Harold in the library.

"You told me to remind you of them, Mr. Fairlie," she said, laughing.

"Many thanks, Miss Hammond, I did," he replied. "I should have been sorry to have left them behind, as they belonged to my dear father. It was careless of me to leave them, unknown to any one here, but I used to read them while waiting for you," he added, smiling.

"Gertrude will find them for you, Mr. Fairlie," Mrs. Heathcote said, as her daughter took a candle from the table, and left the room, followed by Harold, who said "they were doubtless where he left them."

"In the meantime I will put on my cloak," Milley exclaimed, and Walter accompanied her into



the hall, where they stood chatting gaily in the soft lamplight, and inhaling the sweet perfume of the choice flowers blooming on a large marble slab. Mr. Hammond was left still in conversation with Mrs. Heathcote. She was telling him "they had already found a purchaser for the Villa, who offered a much higher price for it than they had thought of asking. It had all been settled by Mr. Heathcote," she said, "but he had not told her the name. He merely said he was a single gentleman, who was going abroad, and would not occupy the house for some months at least, and that we were welcome to remain here until after Christmas, if we chose. It is exceedingly kind of him, whoever he may be; but as we must leave, I feel that the sooner the trial is over, the better for us both," she added, with a sigh. "My dear brother is anxious to have us with him."

We will return to Harold and Gertrude, in the library. The books were soon found, but poor Harold was loth to part with his newly-found happiness. He longed to ask that she might be given to him then; but Gertrude begged him to wait until Christmas, when they should meet again, and she hoped her dear mamma would be stronger, for they feared the least excitement for her in her present

weak state, and at last Harold consented. He had promised at the first that Mrs. Heathcote should share their home, which had greatly relieved the mind of Gertrude, and filled her with joyous anticipations with regard to their future.

"Farewell, Gertrude, my love—my darling," Harold exclaimed, fondly clasping her to his breast, and kissing away the tears that gathered in her beautiful eyes. "The time will be but short, though it will seem an age before we meet again. But we must bear it bravely, darling, and hope for the best."

"O gentle spirit ! thou didst bear unmoved  
- Blasts of adversity and frosts of fate !  
But the first ray of sunshine that falls on thee  
Melts thee to tears ! Oh, let thy weary heart  
Lean upon mine ! and it shall faint no more,  
Nor thirst, nor hunger ; but be comforted,  
And filled with my affection."


She raised her dark tearful eyes to his, and smiled ; and bending tenderly over her, he kissed her coral lips again and again, as he murmured,—

"Farewell, my darling ; may Heaven bless you and keep you safe, now and for ever !

"O Lord, that lends me life,  
Lend me a heart replete with thankfulness !  
For thou hast given me, in this beauteous face,  
A world of earthly blessings to my soul."

In a few moments he was gone, and Gertrude, standing at the open door, could only hear the sound of the receding carriage-wheels that bore her dear friends away. She closed the door, and ran upstairs to her mamma (who had just retired for the night), and giving her a Good-night kiss, left her in her maid's charge, and hastened to her own room, where, falling on her knees, she gave vent to her full heart in a passionate fit of weeping; but as she became more calm she folded her hands in prayer for guidance, and thanked the Giver of all good for his many mercies and blessings.

Happy dreams haunted her pillow that night, and in all of them moved the beloved form of Harold Fairlie. The next morning, at an early hour, the inmates of the parsonage were moving, and all was bustle and excitement, so much so, that the breakfast was left almost untasted upon the table. Harold was to drive to Bath to take the train. Milley and her father were to accompany him to the station. The fly arrived that was to take Mr. Fairlie's luggage; it was packed and ready in the hall, therefore soon loaded, and started off with the groom in charge of it, and Mr. Hammond, Milley, and Mr. Fairlie followed in their own close carriage. The sun had risen, and was striving to break



through the thick mist that hung over hill and dale. Harold cast a fond, lingering look towards the Villa, which was only just discernible through the vapoury fog, as they drove away. The dew hung heavy on the grass, and the trees were dressed in their gorgeous autumn robes of green and red and gold. The labourers were leading out their teams of horses to the fields ; but here and there might be seen a yoke of oxen at plough, with slow measured tread.

"This is a real autumn morning, is it not, papa?" Milley exclaimed, as she turned from the carriage-window, and settled herself comfortably amongst the cushions.

"It is, truly, my child," Mr. Hammond said ; "the year is fast drawing to its last season, namely, winter—a true type of my own declining days ; for surely I have passed the autumn of my life, and know not how soon the angel with the sickle may arrive. Such a morning as this always reminds me of those beautiful lines of Longfellow's, which, perhaps, you are already acquainted with, Mr. Fairlie," he added.

"I may have read them, perhaps, Mr. Hammond ; if so, they have quite escaped my memory, and if it is not troubling you too much, may I ask you to

repeat them, or, at least, some part, if the whole is too long ? ”

With a peaceful smile on his happy face, Mr. Hammond then slowly and distinctly repeated the following lines :—

“ With what a glory comes and goes the year !  
The birds of spring, those beautiful harbingers  
Of sunny skies and cloudless times, enjoy  
Life's newness, and earth's garniture spread out,  
And when the silver habit of the clouds  
Comes down upon the autumn sun, and with  
A sober gladness the old year takes up  
His bright inheritance of golden fruits,  
A pomp and pageant fills the splendid scene.

There is a beautiful spirit breathing now  
Its mellow richness on the clustered trees,  
And, from a beaker full of richest dyes,  
Pouring new glory on the autumn woods,  
And dipping in warm light the pillared clouds.  
Morn on the mountain, like a summer bird,  
Lifts up her purple wing, and in the vales  
The gentle wind, a sweet and passionate wooer,  
Kisses the blushing leaf, and stirs up life  
Within the solemn woods of ash deep-crimsoned,  
And silver beech, and maple yellow-leaved,  
Where Autumn, like a faint old man, sits down  
By the wayside a-weary. Through the trees  
The golden robin moves. The purple finch,  
That on wild cherry and red cedar feeds,  
A winter bird, comes with its plaintive whistle,  
And pecks by the witch-hazel, whilst aloud

From cottage-roofs the warbling blue-bird sings;  
And merrily, with oft-repeated stroke,  
Sounds from the threshing-floor the busy flail.

Oh, what a glory doth this world put on  
For him who, with a fervent heart, goes forth  
Under the bright and glorious sky, and looks  
On duties well performed, and days well spent !  
For him the wind, ay, and the yellow leaves,  
Shall have a voice, and give him eloquent teachings.  
He shall so hear the solemn hymn, that Death  
Has lifted up for all, that he shall go  
To his long resting-place without a tear."

Both Milley and Harold were much pleased with the beautiful lines, and declared they would learn them by heart before they met again.

The three kept up an animated conversation as they drove along the winding road, to the beautiful city of Bath. Sometimes they spoke of the happy meeting they looked forward to at Heathcote Manor, sometimes of the past, and many questions Milley asked Harold respecting his journey, and, lastly, he gave her a slight description of Dover (with which he was well acquainted), of Dover Castle, and the Admiralty Pier, the Harbour of Refuge, and Shakespeare's Cliff.

"No reader of Shakespeare can fail to be familiar with the fine description of a lofty precipice which occurs in the tragedy of 'King Lear,'" Harold said;

"a description which, like the reality itself, fills one with shuddering awe:—

"There is a cliff, whose high and bending head  
Looks fearfully on the confined deep.  
How fearful  
And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low !  
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles : half way down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire—dreadful trade !  
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head :  
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,  
Appear like mice; and yon tall anchoring bark,  
Diminish'd to her cock ; her cock, a buoy  
Almost too small for sight : the murmuring surge,  
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,  
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;  
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight  
Topple down headlong."

Milley smiled, as he concluded, and said how much she would like to stand upon that cliff, and gaze upon the sea.

"When you pay your promised visit to the Château de Beauville, Miss Hammond, you can gratify your wishes, and view these scenes for yourself," Harold said, laughing.

By this time they arrived at the station, and as there were some minutes to spare before the train was due, they paced up and down the platform,

which looked very desolate, as there were few passengers for the early train. Soon the ringing of a bell announced its approach ; porters came hurrying out of the offices, and in a few moments all was bustle and noise, as the shrill whistle of the engine sounded through the station. The luggage was safely stowed away, and Harold bade a kind, but hasty farewell to his friends, and sprang into a first-class carriage, as the train was about to move off. He waved his hand to Milley, who stood still where he left her, leaning one hand on her father's arm, and with the other waved her white handkerchief until he was out of sight, and long before they returned to the parsonage he was speeding many miles away from the fair, peaceful valley of Avondale.

---



## CHAPTER XV.

## THE CHRISTMAS GATHERING.

WE will now pass over a space of time that followed. It was near the end of December ere Harold again trod the shores of old England. It was with a happy, hopeful heart, he landed at Dover, and was driven through the well-remembered streets ; but he was too impatient for either rest or refreshment, and as soon as possible quitted again the picturesque old town, whose—

“ Lofty towers stand sublime,  
Flinging their shadows from on high,  
Like dials which the wizard Time  
Had raised to count his ages by.”

It was Christmas Eve—a Christmas of the old-fashioned kind—not warm, with mild dropping rain and a westerly wind. For weeks before there had been deep falls of snow ; King Frost had hardened it, and the world, as if in preparation for its great festival, was all white. People said how seasonable the weather was, shivering as they spoke, yet pleased

to see the "right thing" for Christmas. They to whom Heaven had given that "kingly dower," a poet's soul, rejoiced in the fair beauty of that Christmas Eve.

At the station Harold found a close carriage, from Heathcote Manor, to meet him, into which he sprang, and was soon driven away. The wind swept merrily over the trees as Harold passed up the grand old avenue, bending their tall heads, tossing their bare branches, stretched out like appealing arms to the night skies, throwing off the snow, which fell from them in fine showers upon the white-frosted ground.

The music of the wind was grand on this Christmas Eve—it sounded like a solemn hosanna. At times it was mournful, mourning and wailing like a lost soul in pain; at times murmuring sweet and solemn secrets; which the leafless trees bent their heads to answer. The fir and cedar trees round Heathcote Manor stood out dark and green under the night skies; the snow lay white and soft upon their branches; the moonbeams lingered on them, as if liking to glisten and shine upon so fair a scene. Heathcote Manor was one of the fairest homesteads in "merrie England." It was situated in a fertile county, where land and water seemed to outvie

each other. At the back of the Manor stood some dark green woods, and in the front was the deep rolling sea. Whoever built the old house had chosen a fair and picturesque spot. There the music of nature was heard in its full perfection ; the sighing of the wind mingled with the chiming of the waves. The moon shone in the clear, dark sky ; the golden stars glistened there ; the moonbeams fell upon the fair world, silvering the trees, gleaming in the icicles, throwing weird shadows on the white ground. Heathcote Manor was something worth seeing. Masses of dark ivy covered the grey walls, and the snow nestled in it ; long icicles hung from the deep eaves ; the Christmas evergreens, the holly trees and dark firs stood out in bold relief. The lake was frozen over, and looked like a sheet of gleaming silver. Over all the moonbeams fell with a bright, cold, clear light. From the Manor House windows the lights streamed ruddily out upon the snow. In the far distance could be heard the breaking of the waves, and the merry chimes of Christmas bells. Inside the old grey walls of Heathcote Manor Christmas was kept in a royal state. It was the one festival of the year, observed with all due pomp and ceremony. Easter, Whitsuntide, and other days of note passed by unheeded ; at Christmas the whole

family gathered together and observed the customs of their ancestors.

It was a group of happy faces that crowded round Harold as the hall door was thrown wide open to admit their guest, and as quickly closed again to exclude the frosty air. There stood the kind old Squire, his face radiant with smiles, and he hastened to give his guest a hearty welcome to Heathcote Manor. At a glance, Harold recognized all his old friends from Avondale, especially the bright, happy face of his "little sister Milley." At last his eyes rested on the one beloved object, for which they had been anxiously seeking. In a moment he was at her side; a silent, but loving clasp of the hands, a happy, tender smile, was far more eloquent than words at such a moment. Mr. Heathcote carried him off to the library to partake of some refreshment, followed by Milley and Gertrude, while the rest repaired to the drawing-room.

"We dressed early on purpose to be ready to welcome you, Mr. Fairlie," Milley said, smiling.

"Very kind of you indeed, Miss Hammond. I am sure I must think myself highly honoured," he said, laughing, and playfully twining round his finger one of Milley's bright golden curls.

"We must not detain Mr. Fairlie too long now, dear

"Milley," Gertrude exclaimed, as she turned to leave the room.

"Oh, no, you do well to remind me ; I forgot the dance ; and Mr. Fairlie has to dress yet," she answered, and they both hurried away.

Harold's eyes followed Gertrude to the door with a tender, admiring glance; he thought she looked more bright and beautiful than he had ever seen her, in her pure white dress, and costly diamonds (her uncle's gift) gleaming in her dark glossy hair ; a bright flush suffused her cheeks, and love and happiness shone in the clear depths of her beautiful dark eyes. Mr. Heathcote conducted Harold to his chamber, up the broad staircase, where the laurel was entwined in many a fantastic wreath. Christmas evergreens in rich profusion adorned the walls and twined round the pillars. The whole house seemed to glow with welcome and warmth.

Harold dressed himself hastily, and descended to the drawing-room, where the Christmas guests were all assembled, and the door opened upon a brilliant scene of gaiety and pleasure. It was a large and magnificently furnished apartment ; rich hangings, costly pictures, and rare statues told of wealth and artistic taste. There was a white marble "Flora," holding a basket of crimson flowers. The "Greek

Slave" shone pale and beautiful from among the green leaves of choice plants. At the far end of the room was a window, consisting of one large, clear sheet of glass; rich velvet hangings fringed it; and at Christmas time, when the room was brilliantly lighted, this large window remained uncovered. From it could be seen the white snow-covered lawn and the tall trees of the park. At first sight strangers imagined it to be an immense picture, and the Squire enjoyed their surprise almost as much as he enjoyed the contrast between the glowing, mellow light of the magnificent room and the white wintry scene spread out below. A brilliant party were assembled in the drawing-room; active hands had wreathed the massive picture-frames, green holly with its scarlet berries, dark tapering firs, shining laurel, the white-flowered laurustinus, the mythical mistletoe, were all there, and seemed to smile in welcome upon the happy faces of the Christmas guests.

In a few moments he was surrounded by all his old friends. Mrs. Heathcote seemed quite strong again, and all were astonished to see her so cheerful—so unlike her former self. There, too, was Walter Payne, also kind old Mr. Hammond, whom Harold was delighted to meet again. At that moment the

first notes of a waltz sounded, and Harold led Gertrude away to join in the dance. Many gazed with admiration at the graceful figure of Gertrude; and it was with a proud, happy smile on his handsome face that Harold led her back to the drawing-room when the dance was ended. They reached the large window, and stood looking out at the snow and the tall, dark trees. The moon shone out clearly and brightly, sailing royally along the bright sky.

"Gertrude, darling," Harold said, tenderly, "make me happy this Christmas Eve. Allow me to ask your mamma this very night that you may be mine; at least, if you love me still, and think you would be happy."

In a low voice, sweeter to him than the softest music, Gertrude whispered,—

"Dear Harold, I have loved none but you."

As she spoke the words, on the clear night air rose the Christmas Carol, sung by the waits standing on the snow-covered lawn.

"Good tidings of great joy," they sang; and Gertrude raised her beautiful face, wet with happy tears.

"Let us take that as a good omen, Harold," she said; "great joy may come for us some day."

"And soon, I trust, my angel," he said fervently. "I will seek your mamma at once."

As he spoke, Mrs. Heathcote drew near, leaning on the arm of the Squire. She heard the words he had just uttered, and as she glanced from one to the other, she guessed the meaning of his pleading look ere the words passed his lips.

"I give you my best treasure, Harold. Guard her well ; and may Heaven bless you, my children, and make you happy." She took her daughter's hand, and laid it in Harold's.

"No one is more worthy of it," said the Squire, proudly glancing at the handsome form at his side. "You were a friend in her hour of sorrow, and Heaven will give you your reward."

At that moment, clear and sweet on the night air, rose the carol,—

"God love you all, good gentlemen,  
May nothing you dismay ;  
God send you peace and happiness  
With every Christmas Day."

Soon after, the supper-bell rang, and the guests repaired to the dining-room ; Harold, with a proud, happy look, led in his beautiful betrothed. There was nothing in which the Squire took such keen delight as in the grand banquet given on Christmas



Eve. No new dishes there for him; but the old boar's head, the prime roast beef, — "England's glory," — geese and turkeys, plum-puddings and mince-pies, followed by the wassail-bowl, — a huge silver bowl, that had been in the family for generations.

It was a pleasant sight to see the Squire at the head of his table, the bright faces around him, — Mrs. Heathcote, still handsome and stately (and looking happier than she had done for years), taking her place as hostess; it was pleasant to hear the sounds of merry voices and silvery laughter; the mellow light from the chandelier falling upon the old silver plate and the rare cut glass. The Squire cast forth admiring glances from time to time at his lovely niece: there were many fair faces round that spacious table, but none so beautiful as "the Rose of Avondale." There was one custom never forgotten: when the wassail-bowl was brought in, a glass filled to the brim was set before each guest; then, while all kept solemn silence, Squire Heathcote stood up reverently, and gave (from his favourite author) "The Founder of the Feast."

"I wish you all, dear friends," said the Squire, in his quaint, genial way, "I wish you all a merry Christmas, and many of them. Let us drink,

with grateful hearts, to "The Founder of the Feast."

Again the words of the carol, sung by the waits, sounded clearly and sweetly on the night air. Just as supper ended, and midnight struck, there came a grand peal from the church bells.

They seemed wild with joy. The guests returned in merry procession to the drawing-room.

"Hardy," said the Squire, stopping to speak to his butler; "see that the carol singers have supper as usual in the servants' hall."

"I will, sir," replied the man, who knew and loved the generosity of his kind master.

Before the happy party separated, it was whispered from one to the other that Miss Heathcote was engaged to the handsome stranger, and many expressed their hopes that the next happy gathering at Heathcote Manor would be to celebrate their wedding.

The dances ended, and one by one the guests departed, leaving good wishes and Christmas greetings behind them; and as the friends bade each other Good-night, Milley smilingly told the Squire that it was the happiest Christmas Eve she had ever spent at Heathcote. What were Gertrude's thoughts on the subject we must leave the reader to imagine;

but, judging from her sparkling eyes and beaming face, Milley's words seemed as the echo of her own glad heart.

New Year's Day came at length, clear and frosty. A merry party of skaters were flying here and there over the bosom of the lake. All seemed calm and still on that wintry afternoon. Peals of joyous laughter occasionally broke the silence that reigned around, and the snow still covered the earth like a soft, white garment. The sun, like a huge ball of fire, was slowly sinking beneath the horizon, when the skaters, tired with their healthful exercise, leisurely returned to the house, with happy hearts and glowing cheeks.

Gertrude had scarcely entered her own room, and thrown off her snowy boots and walking attire, when a gentle tap came at the door, which was softly opened, and Milley's bright, happy face and laughing blue eyes peeped in.

"Come in, darling," Gertrude exclaimed, fondly, as Milley closed the door behind her. A bright fire burned in the low grate, casting its warm, ruddy light over the room; before it, on the soft hearth-rug, knelt Gertrude. In a moment, Milley's arms were thrown round her neck, and a loving kiss imprinted on her cheek.

"It is quite a rare treat to have you all to myself now, darling," Milley said, as she knelt beside her; "but I must not be selfish or complain, but enjoy the pleasure while it is mine," she added, smiling.

"Dear Milley, we might almost fancy we were children again, kneeling on the hearthrug (after our favourite fashion) in the drawing-room at my own dear home, Avon Villa," Gertrude said, a shade of sadness falling on her beautiful face.

"Yes, dear Gertie," Milley answered, tenderly. "How like, and yet how unlike the happy days of our childhood. Many changes have come to us both since then. You have had many trials to bear, which Heaven has mercifully spared me. Oh, Gertie! how can I be sufficiently thankful? My greatest trial has been losing you and dear Mr. Fairlie; but now I can console myself with the thought that you will be happy."

Gertrude's only answer was a tender kiss, and taking Milley's hand in hers, they gazed for some moments in silence at the bright embers of the fire. Presently Milley spoke again.

"Oh, Gertie! I have such a piece of news to tell you," she exclaimed, eagerly; "of course you have heard of the sudden death of Sir Archibald Riversdale?"

"Yes, darling," Gertrude answered.

"Francis is at home again for a time, but only until Mrs. and Miss Graham return to England, which will be at the commencement of the London season, for which they will take a house in town. Report says that Francis has followed Laura like a shadow, and before he left her they were engaged, and the wedding is to take place some time next summer."

"Dear Milley, that does not surprise me in the least," Gertrude replied; "I guessed as much before."

"If you remember," Milley went on, "even from a child Laura had always a proud, wilful temper, which seems to grow with her growth and strengthen with her strength."

"Poor Laura!" Gertrude replied; "I hope they will be happy. But I greatly doubt it," she added, gazing thoughtfully into the glowing embers.

"Unless Laura Graham alters strangely," Milley said, "she will be quite as unlikely to make a gentle, loving wife, as Sir Francis Riversdale a kind, good husband."

"True, my little Milley; but now, darling, we must really go down-stairs," exclaimed Gertrude, rising. "Mamma will wonder what has become of us."

Together they traversed the spacious corridors, and descended the broad staircase to the drawing-room, and were about to enter, when Hardy came up, bearing a small silver waiter, on which lay a gentleman's card. He handed it to Gertrude, and Milley passed into the room.

"A gentleman is waiting in the library, Miss Heathcote, who wishes to speak to you for a few moments on a matter of great importance."

"Who can it be, Hardy?" asked Gertrude, in surprise. "Brooks! the name is quite strange, but I suppose I must see him. Is my uncle at home?"

"Mr. Heathcote is writing in his study, miss," replied the man, respectfully.

"Very well, Hardy, I will see him, and you can wait in the hall." And wondering what the strange visitor could possibly want with her, she followed the butler to the door.

Only one lamp was lighted, and it shone full upon the stranger's face—a pale, careworn face, full and somewhat sorrowful grey eyes, a clear, smooth brow, above which clustered a wealth of soft chestnut curls. A gentle smile passed over his face, as he rose and bowed gracefully to the beautiful girl who entered, apologizing for his intrusion, and begging

she would spare him a few moments, as he had something of importance to say.

Gertrude bowed her assent, and stood waiting for him to proceed.

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A REPENTANT SINNER.

"I AM a curate," he began, "in one of those poor, wretched localities in the vast metropolis, the misery and poverty of which is past describing. A few weeks ago, a poor old widow whom I had occasionally visited came to my house, and begged that I would accompany her home, as one of her lodgers seemed in great distress, and refused to see any one, and that he was now confined to his bed. I returned with her at once, and proceeded up the narrow, creaking staircase to a small back attic, where lay the sick man. He was moaning piteously as I knocked at the door, and for some time I received no answer. At last a weak voice asked in a fretful tone, who was there? 'A friend,' I answered, as I opened the door, and softly entered the bare, comfortless room. At a glance I saw he was an aged man, and looked pale and ill; but with a sudden strength he raised himself upon his elbow, and with angry, flashing eyes, demanded who I was, and how



I dared to enter his room unbidden. 'I know who you are,' he said, 'I need not ask; you are a detective. No one else would take the trouble to seek me; but you cannot rob death of its prey; I shall soon stand before a higher tribunal than yours, and if you have one spark of pity left towards a fellow-creature, leave me to die. Leave me, I say,' he said, hoarsely, and pointed to the door. His face became deadly pale, and he sank back upon the pillow, and I saw that he had fainted. I bathed his temples and chafed the cold, wasted hands, until he slowly regained his consciousness, and, on opening his eyes, he shuddered as he recognized my face. I tried to re-assure him by telling him I was only a friend, come to visit him in his sickness and loneliness; but he still persisted in saying that I was a detective, and holding his hands before his eyes, said, bitterly, 'I deserve that it should be so; Heaven help me!'—'My friend,' I said, 'call me a detective if you will—one of God's detectives, who are on the watch to save poor lost, erring souls, whose feet are wandering over the dark mountains,—whose eyes sin has blinded, that they are unable to read God's Holy Word, which, as a finger-post, points the way to Heaven. These poor souls would be lost for ever, were not some friendly hand

stretched out to save them, and lead them back into the paths of peace, and (as a gaoler might) keep watch over their souls, and put them on their guard against the power of the evil one, that they may, with truly penitent and contrite hearts, prepare to stand before their Judge and Maker, seated on the great white Throne, at whose right hand stands Christ Jesus, the sinner's friend and advocate, who ever maketh intercession for us in that home beyond the grave, to which Death is but as the turnkey, who opens the door, as they one by one pass into the unseen world to receive their doom of eternal happiness or eternal misery.' I saw that he was deeply moved, but he made no answer. I strove gently to comfort and encourage him, and then rose to leave, promising to call again in the evening, which I did, accompanied by a kind doctor with whom I was acquainted. He did not seem to fear me then, but lay pale and still upon his bed. Once he said, mournfully, if I knew what a villain he had been, I should leave him to die as he deserved. But I only said, 'Christ died to save sinners; he died for you and me.' The doctor gave him a composing draught, and after rendering what assistance we could, we took our leave. The doctor then told me he was suffering from one of

the worst of diseases—a diseased mind, and that it was a case for a far greater physician than him—the Physician of the soul. It was evident he was rapidly sinking. Some concealed crime or sorrow was wearing his life away. For days and weeks I visited him, sometimes the doctor also, and in many ways I tried to lead him to speak of his past life or his friends, but in vain. I read to him constantly, and prayed by his bedside, and every day he seemed to become more penitent, and gentle as a little child. One evening I had been reading to him as usual, and, on closing the Bible, I saw tears slowly stealing down his furrowed cheeks. We were alone, and it was then he told me the history of his past life, and the foul blot that had darkened it. The agony of remorse he suffered was too painful to describe. It was very late when I left his bedside that night, and when I visited him early the following day, I found he was anxiously awaiting me. ‘Oh, sir!’ he said, eagerly; ‘I know you will help me, and, please God give me strength, I am resolved what to do.’ I willingly offered my services, if I could be of any assistance to him, and begging me to keep all a profound secret, he unfolded to me his plan. With his last remaining strength he wrote this letter, which will explain all.

"From that time he sank rapidly, but each day found him more resigned and happy, and he used to say he could never be thankful enough to the kind Providence that sent me to him in his darkest hour. A few days before he died he gave this letter I now hold into my charge, and begged, as a last request, that I would place it in your own hands, when he was laid in the silent grave. I found he was far from being in poverty, but that he had chosen that mode of living for greater seclusion ; and I insisted upon his allowing the kind old landlady to keep his room clean and comfortable, and make up a nice bright fire, which she most willingly did ; and many little articles found their way into the sick man's room by degrees, until it began to look quite warm and cheerful. He had sent for a lawyer, and made his will, and then felt much relieved to think that all his earthly affairs were settled.

"One morning, shortly after, I visited him early and found him much worse ; the little, tempting morsels which were to have formed his breakfast remained untasted, and I saw his hours were numbered. He begged me not to leave him ; also entreated me to keep my promise, and thanked me again and again for all my kindness, and prayed that Heaven would reward me. For some time he lay

apparently dozing, and when he opened his eyes, he asked me to read to him once more, for the last time, which I did. I then knelt by the bedside and offered up an earnest prayer, in which he fervently joined, and with prayer still upon his lips he passed away."

Here the speaker seemed deeply moved, and for a few moments all was silent, save the ticking of the large, handsome, bronze clock, as with slow, deliberate strokes, it marked the flight of the enemy, "Time." Presently he spoke again.

"Now, Miss Heathcote," he said, "I am come to perform my promise, and fulfil the wishes of the dead. Read this letter, which will explain all."

Gertrude took the letter, and standing in the soft lamplight, she eagerly tore it open and read as follows (apparently written by a trembling hand):—

"Dear Miss Heathcote (for such I must call you for the last time), I am dying, but feel I cannot leave this world until I have asked your forgiveness for the cruel wrong I did both you and yours. I have been a cold-hearted villain: may the good God pardon me for all my sins! If you only knew the agony of remorse I have suffered, you would forgive me, and feel some pity. Often I have longed to write to your poor mamma, but dared not, and now,

with my last remaining strength, I write to crave your forgiveness, also that of Mrs. Heathcote. I have many things to say, but have not power. I have this day placed in the hands of a lawyer all I possess, except what I gave my good, kind minister, to defray all expenses of my funeral. Oh, Miss Gertrude! you whom I have known from infancy, to you I give back that which is already yours by right; and in doing so I seem to lift a great weight off my heart—a weight that was crushing me lower and lower, until I shudder to think what would have been the end had not the hand of Providence lifted me out of sin and darkness, and caused the light of his love to shine upon me, chasing away the clouds of misery and gloom, and holding out as a free gift pardon and peace. I know not how to be thankful enough to the kind friends who have so kindly ministered to me and cheered my last hours, but God will reward them. The Angel of Death is even now waiting near, but he is welcome, for Christ has died for me, His blood has cleansed away my sins. Forgive me, Miss Heathcote, for all I have done amiss, and if the prayers of a dying man are of any avail, surely mine shall only cease with my frail, fleeting breath, that the blessing of Heaven may

rest upon you, and that your sweet, young life may ever be preserved pure and spotless, and kept from the evils of a wicked world. I trust we shall meet again beyond the reach of sin and sorrow, in that blessed abode of peace and love; and if in after-years a thought of me should ever cross your mind, strive to think charitably, if not kindly, of one who sinned deeply, but afterwards repented. In Heaven, I trust, we shall meet again.—Farewell!”

No name was needed to tell Gertrude who was the writer of that letter. Pale and trembling, she bade the stranger be seated, and hastened to her uncle with the open letter, and, placing it in his hands, sank into a chair at his side. Sad memories of the past came floating before her, mingled with tears of pity for the poor old man, who had thus sinned and suffered. It was her uncle's voice that roused her, as he drew her tenderly towards him, and kissed her fair, white brow.

“Come and speak to the bearer of this letter, uncle; he is waiting in the library.”

“Certainly, darling; I did not know that any one was here; but I see there are no post-marks,” said the Squire, rising, and glancing at the envelope.

“Hardy,” he said, as he passed the butler in the hall; “ask Mrs. Heathcote if she could spare me

a few moments in the library." And, astonished at such an unusual summons, she was soon on the spot; and as they gathered round the stranger he repeated the story, which is already known to our readers. They seemed so completely taken by surprise that they scarcely knew what to say; but the ringing of the dining-bell sounding through the house recalled their wandering thoughts; and, recollecting that, as Mr. Brooks had had a long journey, he was doubtless in need of rest and refreshment, the Squire would not hear of his travelling back to town by the night train, and ordered a chamber to be got ready for him, and took him to his own room meanwhile, to prepare for dinner.

A happy evening they spent, as they gathered round the stranger, though sometimes their tender hearts were touched as they listened, with deep interest, to the tales of poverty and misery related by the young curate, of which he was a constant eye-witness. It was with a feeling of reluctance that they bade each other Good-night; and Harold accompanied the curate to his room, where, seated before a blazing fire, they talked on far into the night. The next day Mr. Brooks took his leave, followed by the good wishes of all assembled at



Heathcote Manor. His quiet, unassuming manners, his life of pious industry and untiring zeal, won the admiration and respect of all,—especially Harold, who expressed himself warmly in favour of the young curate.

Days passed away, the lawyer came, and Gertrude found herself the possessor of four thousand pounds. Thus her secret sorrow was at length removed, from a most unexpected quarter. “Her beloved Harold would not wed a penniless bride, after all,” she thought. The fortune, though small to what it ought to have been, seemed a large one to Gertrude,—large enough to fill her heart with thankfulness and gratitude. One by one the guests had taken their departure from Heathcote Manor. Mr. Hammond and Walter had returned to their parochial duties, and, as an especial favour granted to Gertrude, Milley was left behind a few days longer.

Over the grave of the poor old clerk they ordered a pure white marble cross to be erected; and Harold kindly undertook the journey to London for them, to see how the work was progressing, also glad to embrace the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with Mr. Brooks.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## LITTLE EFFIE.

ONE morning, early in February, as they were seated at breakfast (namely, the Squire and Mrs. Heathcote, Harold and Gertrude), the letters arrived, and one, bearing a foreign post-mark, was addressed to Mr. Fairlie. It proved to be an announcement of the death of the English minister who officiated at Mr. Fairlie's church ; and, being a pious, worthy man, his death was deeply lamented.

The living was then vacant ; and suddenly Harold thought of Mr. Brooks, as a most suitable pastor for the little flock. He resolved to go to him immediately with the offer of the living, which all sincerely hoped he would accept.

On the second day after Harold's departure for London, he wrote a few lines to the Squire, to inform him of his success, and a long letter to Gertrude, in which he informed her that he had been the instrument, in God's hands, of making two people

happy. "Brooks is engaged," he wrote, "to one of the most amiable, sweetest young creatures I ever saw (except my own beautiful Gertrude, of course). Effie Gray was the daughter of an eminent physician. At the age of nineteen she was left an orphan, and, what was worse still, totally unprovided for. Beautiful and accomplished, she was cast upon the wide world to earn her bread as a governess. Poor Brooks's income was not sufficient to enable him to provide for a wife in comfort; thus, much as he regretted the necessity for such a step, he was forced to consent, as, at least, poor little Effie would enjoy the luxuries of a comfortable home. It was a gay, worldly family into which she entered, and deeply she felt the contrast to her own quiet, happy home. But she laboured on steadily and bravely, with a heart full of love and hope, and a firm trust in God, who had been her helper in her time of need. Poor Brooks is almost overjoyed at his unexpected good fortune. Effie will leave her situation as soon as she can conveniently do so, and I trust they are now about to reap the reward of their patient labours."

With true womanly sympathy, Gertrude pitied the lonely lot of the orphan, and wished she was

near, that she might make her acquaintance and render her some assistance ; thus, with a grave, thoughtful face, she carefully refolded her letter, and placed it again in the envelope. Presently she raised her eyes, and, gazing at the Squire with a loving smile, she told him all, and said,—

“ Dear uncle, may not Effie come to us ; may the orphan find shelter under your roof for a time ? ”

“ Certainly, my darling,” answered the Squire, fondly laying his hand on the head of his beautiful niece ; “ that is a happy thought of yours, and I will gladly give Effie Gray a cordial welcome to Heathcote Manor.”

“ Kindly spoken, like my own dear uncle,” Gertrude said, fondly stroking the silvery hair.

The weeks rolled on, until at length the day arrived which was to bring with it the orphan, Effie Gray. Gertrude had invited Milley to meet their new friend, and joyously she had accepted the invitation. The sun shone clear and bright on that pleasant afternoon, late in March, and the wind bowed the stately heads of the daffodils, tossing them about like clouds of gold, as, side by side, with happy, healthful faces, the two girls walked round the spacious garden. It wore its soberest and tenderest hues of brown and green. The borders were

gay with the flowers of spring ; snowdrops and crocuses were peeping forth in all directions, while here and there violets were filling the air with their fragrance. Such a day Macdonald truly described when he wrote thus :—

“ A gentle wind of western birth,  
From some far summer sea,  
Wakes daisies in the wintry earth ;  
Wakes thoughts of hope in me.

Young gleams of sunshine peep and play,  
Thick vapours crowd between ;  
'Tis strange that on a coming day  
The earth will all be green.

The north wind blows, and blasts, and raves,  
And flaps his snowy wing ;  
Back ! toss thy bergs on arctic waves,  
Thou canst not stay our spring.

Up comes the primrose wondering,  
The snowdrop droopeth by ;  
The Holy Spirit of the spring  
Is working silently.

Blow on me, wind, from west and south,—  
Sweet summer spirit, blow !  
Come like a kiss from dear child's mouth,  
Who knows not what I know.

The earth's perfection cometh soon,  
Ours lingereth alway ;  
We have a spring-time, have a noon,  
No sunny summer day.

But at the last a sapphire day  
All over us will bow ;  
And man's full heart of sunlight say,  
' Lord, 'tis thy summer now.' "

---

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## WEDDING BELLS.

HAROLD FAIRLIE and the Squire were just returning from a visit to the sheepfolds, and, meeting the two girls, they walked back to the house together. They were no sooner seated at their favourite window in the drawing-room, than they heard the sound of wheels, and hastened down-stairs, to receive and welcome their new guest.

It was a slight, graceful figure that sprang lightly from the carriage, assisted by Harold. Her dress was simplicity and neatness itself, while from beneath her little straw hat fell a profusion of soft, brown ringlets. There was a look of patient resignation in the clear depths of the beautiful hazel eyes, almost amounting to sadness ; but her smile was one of angelic sweetness—a happy smile, which spoke of innocence and purity of mind.

“There was a soft and pensive grace,  
A cast of thought upon her face,  
That suited well the forehead high,  
The eye-lash dark, and down-cast eye ;  
The mild expression spoke a mind  
In duty firm, composed, resign’d.”

When Gertrude and Milley bade Effie Gray

Good-night that evening, and retired to their chamber, to indulge (as usual) in a little confidential conversation over the glowing embers of Gertrude's fire, they both expressed themselves as perfectly charmed with their new friend.

"What a delightful companion and neighbour you will have in your new home, Gertie," Milley said, archly; "so you will not miss me so much, after all."

"Hush, Milley, darling," replied Gertrude, throwing her arms round her neck and kissing her cherry lips; "I shall doubtless find in Effie Gray a dear, kind friend; but she cannot fill the place of my sweet little sister."

We will pass over that happy time; the long, pleasant rambles through the woods and fields, or sometimes along the distant shore, and evenings with their pleasant, fireside gatherings.

The spring was advancing in all its beauty. The gardens and grounds were gay with lovely flowers. Beautiful laburnums were drooping their golden blossoms, and the trees wore their verdant robe of green, and among their branches the birds were singing their sweet, gladsome songs, and the beautiful grass seemed all bursting into life, covering the earth with its soft, emerald robe.



"The grass, the grass, the beautiful grass !  
That brightens this land of ours !  
Oh ! why do we rudely let it pass,  
And only praise the flowers !  
The blossom of spring small joys would bring,  
And the summer-bloom look sad,  
Were the earth not green, and the distant scene  
In its emerald robe not clad.  
Then sing the grass, the beautiful grass !  
That brightens this land of ours ;  
For there is not a blade by Nature made  
Less perfect than the flowers."

Great preparations were going on at Heathcote Manor for Mr. Brooks's marriage with the gentle orphan, and poor little Effie begged that it might be a very quiet one, but her friends had willed it otherwise, and she was forced to submit.

Thus months passed away, until one bright morning in June sweet little Effie was led to the altar by the good old Squire, who placed her hand in that of the young curate. Gertrude and Milley were bridesmaids, and beautiful bridesmaids they were. Crowds of people assembled to witness that fair procession. The pathway was strewed with flowers, and the wedding bells rang out in joyous peals from the old grey tower. Then followed the parting, and Mr. Brooks and his sweet little bride bade adieu to their kind friends at Heathcote

Manor, and entered upon the duties of the new, untried life before them, and Milley returned to the peaceful little parsonage at Avondale.

A few days later, Harold Fairlie took his departure for the Château, to make the final preparations for bringing home his bride. It was the month of August ere he returned to Heathcote Manor.

At length the auspicious morn arrived, ushered in by the booming of cannons and the pealing of bells, and the sweet voices of the school-children singing under Gertrude's window. At an early hour the whole neighbourhood was astir, as if scarcely knowing how to do sufficient honour to the day. The church was decorated with the loveliest flowers, flowers covered the pathway, flowers seemed everywhere; but all declared that the fairest flower was the beautiful "Rose of Avondale." With a proud, fond smile on his noble face, the Squire led to the altar his lovely niece. As a matter of course, Milley was bridesmaid, with several others. Good, old Mr. Hammond was the officiating minister, to the intense joy of all. Gertrude's face was wet with tears; but they were tears of joy, as she left the church, leaning trustingly on the arm of her loving husband.

"This chanced upon a summer morn,  
When yellow waved the heavy corn.  
But when brown August o'er the land  
Called forth the reaper's busy hand,

\* \* \* \* \*

Awhile the hardy rustic leaves  
The task to bind and pile the sheaves,  
And maids their sickles fling aside,  
To gaze on bridegroom and on bride ;  
And childhood's wondering group draws near ;  
And from the gleaner's hands the ear  
Drops, while she folds them for a prayer  
And blessings on the lovely pair."

---

## CHAPTER XIX.

## WELCOME HOME.

BEFORE leaving England they had agreed to spend a week at Avondale, and Gertrude was delighted at the thought of going back once more amongst the people she loved. Accordingly, in the afternoon the happy bride and bridegroom set out for the dear old peaceful spot. It was a glorious afternoon, and the sun shone in all its dazzling brightness as they neared Avondale. The tears would come into her eyes as she gazed at each familiar object in the well-remembered road. Presently they came to a place where two roads met; one leading to the parsonage, the other winding round the hill, past Avon Villa.

"Dear Harold," Gertrude exclaimed, suddenly, looking out, "they have taken the wrong turning; this does not lead to the parsonage."

"No, darling," Harold replied, with a quiet smile.

"Tell the coachman at once then, dear," she said, quickly. "Alas! my once happy home—my home no longer now," she added, sorrowfully gazing up at it.

"It is still your home, my darling—your home and mine ; and God grant it may be a happy one ! " Harold said, clasping her fondly to his breast.

She raised her lustrous dark eyes to his face in mute astonishment, while in few words Harold told her all : how he had bought the Villa, and, with her uncle's help, had kept the secret.

"As a glad surprise for me on our wedding-day, she said, fondly ; "dear, dear Harold !" and the lovely head sank upon his faithful breast. Her heart was too full for words.

The dear old church-bells were ringing out joyous peals of welcome, while occasionally the sound of a cannon reverberated through the valley. In the road a crowd of people had assembled, who hailed their approach with loud cheers.

The carriage stopped, and a group of strong, sturdy men were busy unfastening the horses' harness.

"What is the meaning of this ? " Gertrude asked, in astonishment.

"It means, darling, that you live here still in the hearts of the people, of which this is a token," Harold answered, tenderly.

The horses were removed, and with strong arms and willing hearts, they were drawn up to the Villa.

Never will Harold and Gertrude forget the sight that awaited them.

Young men and maidens, old men and children, had all assembled with one accord to bid them welcome, and as Harold assisted his lovely bride to alight from the carriage, and led her up the well-known steps, the cheers and shouts of welcome became almost deafening. They gazed round upon the old familiar faces, and Harold thanked them warmly for the kind welcome they had given himself and Mrs. Fairlie.

Again the cheers rose, long and loud.

"God bless 'the Rose of Avondale' and her noble husband!" shouted poor old Andrew, his honest face beaming with smiles and satisfaction; and after one more cheer, the crowd quietly dispersed, and in happy groups returned to their cottage homes.

"Dear Harold," said Gertrude, as she stood by her husband's side in the pretty drawing-room, "it seems like some happy dream, from which I shall presently awake."

"Is this a dream? Oh! if it be a dream,  
Let me sleep on, and do not wake me yet!"  
"It is a dream, sweet child! a waking dream,  
A blissful certainty, a vision bright  
Of that rare happiness which ever on earth  
Heaven gives to those it loves."

The next day Mr. Hammond and his daughter returned to the parsonage, and the day following a sumptuous dinner was prepared at Avon Villa, to which all the inhabitants of Avondale were invited; nor were the school-children forgotten; for them a nice tea was prepared on the flowery lawn, and each child received a little parting gift from Gertrude's own fair hands. At length they bade adieu to their pretty home and kind friends until the following spring, when they promised to return and spend the delightful summer months with them.

They went back to Heathcote Manor, where they had left Mrs. Heathcote busily engaged with preparations for their departure, and together they set sail for the Continent.

Gertrude's dark eyes sparkled with joy and admiration as they drew up to the Château. Although she had heard a glowing description of her future home, it had not conveyed to her mind one half of the beauty of the reality.

Mr. Brooks and his sweet, gentle wife were waiting to receive them, and close behind stood the faithful old nurse and steward, whose honest hearts rejoiced to welcome the bride of their beloved young master, especially one so beautiful and good.

" His house she enters, there to be a light  
Shining within when all without is night ;  
A guardian angel o'er his life presiding,  
Doubling his pleasures, and his cares dividing ;  
Winning him back, when mingling in the throng,  
From a vain world we love, alas ! too long,  
To fireside happiness and hours of ease,  
Blest with that charm, the certainty to please.  
How oft her eyes read his ! her gentle mind  
To all his wishes, all his thoughts inclined ;  
Still subject ever on the watch to borrow  
Mirth of his mirth, and sorrow of his sorrow."

Several months passed away,—calm, peaceful, happy months,—when Mrs. Heathcote received a letter from some friends who were travelling up the Rhine, begging her to meet them there. Accordingly, she set out, accompanied by Harold and Gertrude.

Who should they see on board the Rhine boat but Sir Francis Riversdale and his bride. One look at his handsome, vain face told that he was not a happy man. The fair lady had a will and temper of her own, before which he bent like a reed in the wind. Gertrude glanced at Laura's handsome face. It was little changed ; the glowing Spanish beauty was still there, but the lines had deepened on the broad brow and round the proud lips. Retribution



had overtaken Sir Francis in the shape of a proud, ill-tempered, haughty wife, and he knew it.

There was some little altercation between them. The lady wished to land at one place; her husband desired to stop at another.

With a few sharp, sarcastic words, every one of which had a sting, the lady carried her own point. Flushed with rage and annoyance that he dared not show, for fear of increasing her ill-temper, her husband left her, and crossed over to the side of the boat where Mrs. Heathcote, her friends and children, sat. He was too angry to notice those who were near him; but his attention was drawn at last by the eager admiration of some German gentlemen.

"I tell you," said one, "she has the face of an angel,—of an angel, mind you. I have never seen any one so beautiful in all my life."

Sir Francis followed the glance of the speaker's eye. He looked again upon a sweet, pure face, whose loveliness had increased,—upon calm, tender eyes, upon noble features, bearing the impress of a high and spiritual nature. He saw again the dark glossy hair and the graceful figure of the young girl whose misfortune he had crowned with insult.

He made one hasty step towards her and her mother, muttering some confused words of greeting,

and presuming to hold out his hand. Mrs. Heathcote looked him calmly and quietly in the face, giving no token of recognition. Gertrude smilingly turned her beautiful head away, and Sir Francis fell back abashed and ashamed, feeling, for the first time in his life, that, although he was the owner of St. Catherine's Court, he might still be an object of contempt.

---

## CHAPTER XX.

## JOY AND PEACE.

TIME had flown on with its ever ceaseless roll. Six years had passed away, and had brought few changes for the happy inmates of the peaceful Château de Beauville, except that the gladsome sound of children's merry voices and the pattering of tiny feet re-echoed through its marble halls. Poor old Monsieur Jacques had passed away, and beneath a waving cypress in the quiet graveyard reposed his slumbering dust (near the beautiful marble tomb), but not before the honest heart of the good old man had rejoiced over the birth of the first-born son of his beloved young master and mistress; and above his grave they placed a pure white stone, in affectionate remembrance of "a good and faithful servant."

Three years after the marriage of Gertrude, the good old Squire had breathed his last, surrounded by those he loved. He bequeathed a large fortune to his niece, and the estate had passed into the hands of a distant, but only surviving male relation.

Each year Harold and Gertrude, accompanied by Mrs. Heathcote and their children, spent the long, pleasant summer months at Avon Villa.

Their little joyous friend, Milley Hammond, is Milley Hammond no longer. She is a wife and mother now. Owing to the death of an uncle, Walter Payne became the possessor of a large fortune. He purchased a sweet little villa, overlooking the beautiful city of Bath, and thither he took his lovely bride, after spending the honeymoon, according to the old promise, at the Château de Beauville. The good old pastor, owing to his increasing infirmities, had resigned his living, and with his beloved children hoped to end his days in peace; and every winter, when the stormy winds swept over hill and dale, and the snow lay thick over the ground, they sought the warm, genial air of the sunny south. They were ever welcome guests at the Château.

Thus it was that one afternoon, toward the middle of December, they were hourly expected there.

Mrs. Heathcote was lying on a sofa in the drawing-room; by her side sat her daughter, busily working a delicate piece of embroidery; and near her sat her beloved husband, reading aloud to them both.

Mrs. Heathcote's eyes rested with a loving smile on the handsome face of her dear son, and her thoughts went back, as they so often did, to the days that were past and gone. She had learned that one true and noble heart was worth a thousand titles. She thought how different would have been her lot had her child become Lady Riversdale; and as she glanced at her sweet, serene face, she knew that she was happy, and thanked God with a heart overflowing with love and gratitude.

Nothing could exceed Harold's tender care and thought for the mother of his gentle wife; and she almost seemed to grow younger in the genial atmosphere of love that surrounded her.

A gentle tap was heard at the door. It was softly opened by Madame Ernond from the outside, and in bounded a rosy-cheeked little fellow, of four years old, with bright blue eyes and golden hair, and, with all the pride of an elder brother, led by the hand a sweet little girl of two short summers, with dark hair and hazel eyes, over which the long fringed lashes drooped; and as they clung around their mother's knee, it was impossible to say which was dearest to her tender heart—her happy, joyous Harold, or the sweet little gentle Rosine.

Presently they started up as they heard the sound of carriage-wheels.

"Here they come, darlings," Gertrude said, going towards the door.

"Let's drow an hide, Osy; let's drow an hide," exclaimed little Harold, dragging his sister by the hand; and away they ran, fast as their little feet could carry them, across the marble hall, and behind the thick folds of the rich, crimson, velvet curtains, they completely hid themselves.

"Hush, Osy, dear; don't laugh," said little Harold, shaking his head and raising a warning finger.

Milley entered the hall, leading a noble-looking little fellow of three years old, attended by his nurse. He was the very image of his fair, young mother; and those who gazed upon her happy face, saw that it was little changed.

Close behind followed her aged father, whose tottering footsteps were supported by the strong arm of his dear son.

After the first warm greetings were over, Milley asked for the little ones.

"Here we are," shouted two little voices from behind the curtains, and they sprang out laughing

from their hiding-place, clapping their hands with childish glee.

Milley fondly kissed the little up-raised faces, and with Gertrude repaired to the nursery.

"Tum along, Wallie, dis way," said little Harold, taking the child's hand, and, assuming a very manly air, conducted his little friend to the nursery, leaving his sister in mamma's care.


A nice tea was waiting for them, and as an especial treat, Madame Ermond had promised to be their guest.

"I dow fetch nursesey," exclaimed little Harold; and away he ran to her pretty sitting-room, and pushing open the door, asked in his sweet little merry voice,

"Ou eddy, nursesey dear?"

"I am coming, darling," she answered, fondly kissing the child, and, holding out her hand, she led him back to the nursery.

Though time had left its traces on her once smooth, broad brow, and silvered her soft, brown hair, she was still what people called an active woman. She loved the children with almost a mother's fondness. They were to her the light of her life, the joy of her heart; and she never seemed so happy as when seated in her arm-chair in



the nursery, with one on her knee and the other by her side, reading little tales to them, or telling them what papa used to do when he was little, and sat on her knee just like them.

Another nurse had been engaged for them from England; but against the wish of Mr. and Mrs. Fairlie, she still determined to do her part for the little ones as long as she was able, for she could never be happy in idleness away from them, so they were forced to submit; and they both felt that so long as the children were under her kind care all would be well.

Leaving the little happy faces smiling round the tea-table, Gertrude and Milley returned to the friends in the drawing-room, where they chatted until the ringing of the dressing-bell.

It was a happy group that gathered round the well-spread table that evening.

Mr. Brooks and his sweet, gentle wife had been invited to join them.

They were but little altered; except that a happier smile shone in the mild grey eyes of the loving husband, as they rested from time to time on the beautiful face of his darling "little Effie," as he still called her. They had been called upon to mourn the death of their first-born; but God had



blessed them with another babe (whom they christened Gertrude), and their sorrowing hearts were comforted.

When they retired to the drawing-room, at Mr. Hammond's request, Gertrude and Milley sang together some of his favourite songs, after which they gathered round him to talk over the memories that those dear songs had awakened ; but soon they seemed to forget the past in talking of the present. Milley had lots of news to tell Gertrude, especially news from Avondale. Many changes had taken place, and several of the good old people had passed away since she left in the autumn. Sir Francis was little beloved at the Court, and the whole neighbourhood rang with stories of the fierce temper and haughty pride of Lady Riversdale. Mrs. Heathcote shuddered and glanced at her lovely child, and again thanked Heaven for her happiness.

The good old pastor gazed, with a smile on his serene, happy face, at those assembled round him. His heart seemed to overflow with thankfulness to the bountiful Giver of all good, who had thus blessed and prospered them. His eyes at last rested on the face of his dear child, happy and joyous as ever, and from her they wandered to the face of her fair companion, Gertrude. Sitting in

the midst of those she loved, a bright smile lighting up her beautiful face, she looked lovely as ever, and even more lovable than in the days of her sweet, beautiful girlhood, when she was first called "the Rose of Avondale."

THE END.



1. The first step in the process of creating a new product is to identify a market need. This is often done through market research, which can involve surveys, focus groups, and other methods of gathering information from potential customers.

2. Once a market need has been identified, the next step is to develop a concept for the new product. This involves brainstorming ideas and determining the key features and benefits of the product.

3. The third step is to create a prototype of the product. This can be done using a variety of methods, including 3D printing, computer-aided design (CAD), and other manufacturing techniques.

4. Once a prototype has been created, the next step is to test the product. This involves conducting experiments and gathering feedback from potential customers to determine the product's viability.

5. The final step in the process is to launch the product. This involves marketing the product, distributing it, and monitoring its performance in the market.

6. After the product has been launched, it is important to continue to monitor its performance and gather feedback from customers. This can help identify areas for improvement and inform future product development.

7. The process of creating a new product is an iterative one, and it may take several cycles of development, testing, and launch before a product is successful.

8. It is important to have a clear understanding of the market and the needs of potential customers throughout the entire process.

9. Having a strong marketing strategy in place before launching the product can help ensure its success.

10. Finally, it is important to be flexible and open to change throughout the process, as the market and customer needs may evolve over time.

11. The process of creating a new product is a complex one, but it is essential for businesses looking to stay competitive in the market.

12. By following these steps, businesses can increase their chances of creating a successful new product.

13. The process of creating a new product is a key part of a business's overall strategy.

14. It is important to have a clear understanding of the market and the needs of potential customers throughout the entire process.

15. Having a strong marketing strategy in place before launching the product can help ensure its success.

16. Finally, it is important to be flexible and open to change throughout the process, as the market and customer needs may evolve over time.

17. The process of creating a new product is a complex one, but it is essential for businesses looking to stay competitive in the market.

18. By following these steps, businesses can increase their chances of creating a successful new product.

19. The process of creating a new product is a key part of a business's overall strategy.

20. It is important to have a clear understanding of the market and the needs of potential customers throughout the entire process.

